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of The LABRADOR

By NORMAN DUNCAN

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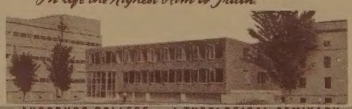

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DOCTOR LUKE of THE LABRADOR

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DOCTOR LUKE of THE LABRADOR

by NORMAN DUNCAN

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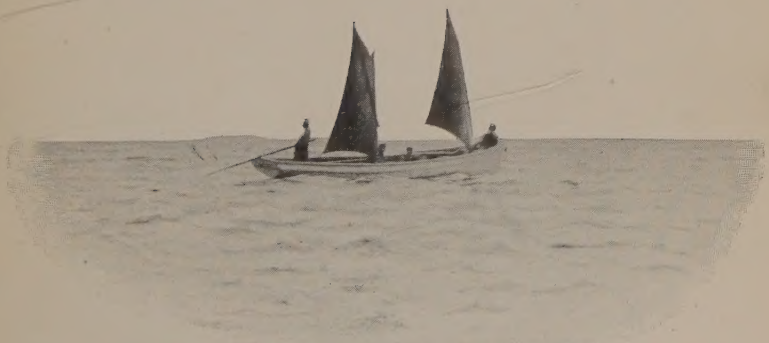
To
My Own Mother
and to
her granddaughter
Elspeth
my niece



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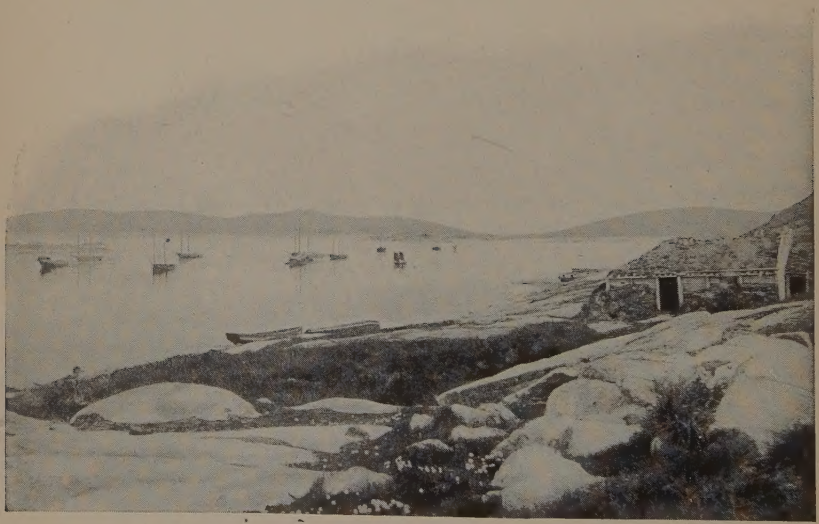

To the Reader

HOWEVER bleak the Labrador—however naked and desolate that shore—flowers bloom upon it. However bitter the despoiling sea—however cold and rude and merciless—the gentler virtues flourish in the hearts of the folk. . . . And the glory of the coast—and the glory of the whole world—is mother-love: which began in the beginning and has continued unchanged to this present time—the conspicuous beauty of the fabric of life: the great constant of the problem.

N. D.

College Campus,
Washington, Pennsylvania,
October 15, 1904.

Note to the Fourth Edition

SOME readers of the earlier editions of this book have unhappily assumed that in "Doctor Luke" the character and achievements of Dr. Wilfred T. Grenfell of the Royal National Mission to Deep-sea Fishermen have been presented. The author wishes explicitly to state that the hero of the novel does not in the least resemble Dr. Grenfell: nor was it ever intended that he should. Later readers of the story are thus warned against this growing misconception.

NORMAN DUNCAN.

March, 1905.

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SOUTH TICKLE
RAVEN ROCK
THE CAPE
THIRTY BLACK DEVILS

DOCTOR LUKE of THE LABRADOR

I

OUR HARBOUR

A CLUSTER of islands, lying off the cape, made the shelter of our harbour. They were but great rocks, gray, ragged, wet with fog and surf, rising bleak and barren out of a sea that forever fretted a thousand miles of rocky coast as barren and as sombre and as desolate as they; but they broke wave and wind unfailingly and with vast unconcern—they were of old time, mighty, steadfast, remote from the rage of weather and the changing mood of the sea, surely providing safe shelter for us folk of the coast—and we loved them, as true men, everywhere, love home.

"'Tis the cleverest harbour on the Labrador!" said we.

When the wind was in the northeast—when it broke, swift and vicious, from the sullen waste of water beyond, whipping up the grey sea, driving in

the vagrant ice, spreading clammy mist over the reefs and rocky headlands of the long coast—our harbour lay unruffled in the lee of God's Warning. Skull Island and a shoulder of God's Warning broke the winds from the north: the froth of the breakers, to be sure, came creeping through the north tickle, when the sea was high; but no great wave from the open ever disturbed the quiet water within. We were fended from the southerly gales by the massive, beetling front of the Isle of Good Promise, which, grandly unmoved by their fuming rage, turned them up into the black sky, where they went screaming northward, high over the heads of the white houses huddled in the calm below; and the seas they brought —gigantic, breaking seas—went to waste on Raven Rock and the Reef of the Thirty Black Devils, ere, their strength spent, they growled over the jagged rocks at the base of the great cliffs of Good Promise and came softly swelling through the broad south tickle to the basin. The west wind came out of the wilderness, fragrant of the far-off forest, lying unknown and dread in the inland, from which the mountains, bold and blue and forbidding, lifted high their heads; and the mist was then driven back into the gloomy seas of the east, and the sun was out, shining warm and yellow, and the sea, lying in the lee of the land, was all aripple and aflash.

When the spring gales blew—the sea being yet white with drift-ice—the schooners of the Newfoundland fleet, bound north to the fishing, often came scurrying into our harbour for shelter. And when the skippers, still dripping the spray of the gale from beard and sou'wester, came ashore for a yarn and an hospitable glass with my father, the trader, many a tale of wind and wreck and far-away harbours I heard, while we sat by the roaring stove in my father's little shop: such as those which began, "Well, 'twas the wonderfullest gale o' wind you ever seed—snowin' an' blowin', with the sea in mountains, an' it as black as a wolf's throat—an' we was somewheres off Cape Mugford. She were drivin' with a nor'east gale, with the shore somewheres handy t' le'ward. But, look! nar a one of us knowed where she were to, 'less 'twas in the thick o' the Black Heart Reefs. . . ." Stout, hearty fellows they were who told yarns like these—thick and broad about the chest and lanky below, long-armed, hammer-fisted, with frowsy beards, bushy brows, and clear blue eyes, which were fearless and quick to look.

"'Tis a fine harbour you got here, Skipper David Roth," they would say to my father, when it came time to go aboard, "an' here, zur," raising the last glass, "is t' the rocks that make it!"

"T' the schooners they shelter!" my father would respond.

When the weather turned civil, I would away to the summit of the Watchman—a scamper and a mad climb—to watch the doughty little schooners on their way. And it made my heart swell and flutter to see them dig their noses into the swelling seas—to watch them heel and leap and make the white dust fly—to feel the rush of the wet wind that drove them—to know that the grey path of a thousand miles was every league of the way beset with peril. Brave craft! Stout hearts to sail them! It thrilled me to watch them beating up the suddy coast, lying low and black in the north, and through the leaden, ice-strewn seas, with the murky night creeping in from the open. I, too, would be the skipper of a schooner, and sail with the best of them!

"A schooner an' a wet deck for me!" thought I.

And I loved our harbour all the more for that.

Thus, our harbour lay, a still, deep basin, in the shelter of three islands and a cape of the mainland: and we loved it, drear as it was, because we were born there and knew no kinder land; and we boasted it, in all the harbours of the Labrador, because it was a safe place, whatever the gale that blew.

II

The WORLD From The WATCHMAN

THE Watchman was the outermost headland of our coast and a landmark from afar—a great gray hill on the point of Good Promise by the Gate; our craft, running in from the Hook-an'-Line grounds off Raven Rock, rounded the Watchman and sped thence through the Gate and past Frothy Point into harbour. It was bold and bare—scoured by the weather—and dripping wet on days when the fog hung thick and low. It fell sharply to the sea by way of a weather-beaten cliff, in whose high fissures the gulls, wary of the hands of the lads of the place, wisely nested; and within the harbour it rose from Trader's Cove, where, snug under a broken cliff, stood our house and the little shop and storehouse and the broad drying-flakes and the wharf and fish-stages of my father's business. From the top there was a far, wide outlook—all sea and rock: along the ragged, treeless coast, north and south, to the haze wherewith, in distances beyond the ken of lads, it melted; and upon the thirty wee white houses of our folk, scattered haphazard about the harbour water,

each in its own little cove and each with its own little stage and great flake; and over the barren, swelling rock beyond, to the blue wilderness, lying infinitely far away.

I shuddered when from the Watchman I looked upon the wilderness.

"'Tis a dreadful place," I had heard my father say. "Men starves in there."

This I knew to be true, for, once, I had seen the face of a man who came crawling out.

"The sea is kinder," I thought.

Whether so or not, I was to prove, at least, that the wilderness was cruel.

One blue day, when the furthest places on sea and land lay in a thin, still haze, my mother and I went to the Watchman to romp. There was place there for a merry gambol, place, even, led by a wiser hand, for roaming and childish adventure —and there were silence and sunlit space and sea and distant mists for the weaving of dreams— ay, and, upon rare days, the smoke of the great ships, bound down the Straits—and when dreams had worn the patience there were huge loose rocks handy for rolling over the brow of the cliff—and there was gray moss in the hollows, thick and dry and soft, to sprawl on and rest from the delights of

the day. So the Watchman was a playground for my mother and me—my sister, my elder by seven years, was all the day long tunefully busy about my father's comfort and the little duties of the house—and, on that blue day, we climbed the broken cliff behind our house and toiled up the slope beyond in high spirits, and we were very happy together; for my mother was a Boston maid, and, though she turned to right heartily when there was work to do, she was not like the Labrador born, but thought it no sin to wander and laugh in the sunlight of the heads when came the blessed opportunity.

"I'm fair done out," said I, at last, returning, flushed, from a race to Beacon Rock.

"Lie here, Davy—ay, but closer yet—and rest," said she.

I flung myself at full length beside her, spreading abroad my sturdy little arms and legs; and I caught her glance, glowing warm and proud, as it ran over me, from toe to crown, and, flashing prouder yet through a gathering mist of tears, returned again.

"I knows why you're lookin' at me that way," said I.

"And why?" said she.

"'Tis for sheer love o' me!"

She was strangely moved by this. Her hands, passionately clasped of a sudden, she laid upon

her heart; and she drew a sharp, quivering breath.

"You're getting so—so—strong and—and—so *big!*" she cried.

"Hut!" said I. "'Tis nothin' t' cry about!"

"Oh," she sobbed, "I'm *proud* t' be the mother of a son!"

I started up.

"I'm that proud," she went on, hovering now between great joy and pain, "that it—it—fair *hurts* me!"

"I'll not have you cry!" I protested.

She caught me in her arms and we broke into merry laughter. Then to please her I said that I would gather flowers for her hair—and she would be the stranded mermaid and I the fisherman whom she besought to put her back in the sea and rewarded with three wishes—and I sought flowers everywhere in the hollows and crevices of the bald old Watchman, where, through years, some soil had gathered, but found only whisps of wiry grass and one wretched blossom; whereupon I returned to her very wroth.

"God made a botch o' the world!" I declared.

She looked up in dismay.

"Ay," I repeated, with a stamp of the foot, "a wonderful botch o' the world He's gone an' made. Why, they's but one flower on the Watchman!"

She looked over the barren land—the great gray waste of naked rock—and sighed.

"But one?" she asked, softly.

"An I was God," I said, indignantly, "I'd have made *more* flowers an' made un *bigger*."

She smiled in the way of one dreaming.

"Hut!" I went on, giving daring wing to my imagination. "I'd have made a hundred kinds an' soil enough t' grow un all—*every one o' the whole hundred!* I'd have ——"

She laid a soft hand on my lips. "'Tis a land," she whispered, with shining eyes, "that grows rosy lads, and I'm well content!"

"'Tis a poor way," I continued, disregarding her caress, "t' gather soil in buckets. *I'd* have made enough t' gather it in *barrows!* I'd have made lots of it—heaps of it. Why," I boasted, growing yet more recklessly prodigal, "I'd have made a *hill* of it somewheres handy t' every harbour in the world—as big as the Watchman—ay, an' handy t' the harbours, so the folk could take so much as they wanted—t' make potato-gardens—an'—an' t' make the graveyards deep enough. 'Tis a wonderful poor way," I concluded with contempt, "t' have t' gather it in buckets from the rocks!"

My mother was laughing heartily now.

"'Twould not be a better world, thinks you?"

said I. "Ay, but I could do better than that! Hut!" I cried, at last utterly abandoned to my imagination, "I'd have more things than potatoes grow in the ground an' more things than berries grow on bushes. *What* would I have grow in the ground, says you? Is you thinkin' I don't *know?* Oh, ay, mum," I protested, somewhat at a loss, but very knowingly, "*I* knows!" I was now getting rapidly beyond my depth; but I plunged bravely on, wondering like lightning, the while, what else *could* grow in the ground and on bushes. "I'd have *flour* grow in the ground, mum," I cried, triumphantly, "an' I'd have sea-boots an' sou'westers grow on the bushes. An', ecod!" I continued, inspired, "I'd have fishes grow on bushes, already split an' cleaned!"

What other improvements I would have made on the good Lord's handiwork I do not know. Skipper Tommy Lovejoy, being on the road to Trader's Cove from the Rat Hole, where he lived alone with his twin lads, had spied us from Needle Rock, and now came puffing up the hill to wish my mother good-day: which, indeed, all true men of the harbour never failed to do, whenever they came near. He was a short, marvellously broad, bow-legged old man—but yet straight and full of strength and fine hope—all the while dressed in tight white moleskin

(much soiled by the slime of the day's work), long skin boots, tied below the knees, and a ragged cloth cap, which he kept pulled tight over his bushy grey hair. There was a mild twinkle forever lying in the depths of his blue eyes, and thence, at times, overflowing upon his broad brown face, which then rippled with wrinkles, from the roots of his hair to the fringe of white beard under his chin, in a way at once to make one laugh with him, though one could not quite tell why. We lads of the harbour loved him very much, for his good-humour and for his tenderness—never more so, however, than when, by night, in the glow of the fire, he told us long tales of the fairies and wicked elves he had dealt with in his time, twinkling with every word, so that we were sorely puzzled to know whether to take him in jest or earnest.

"I've a very bad son, the day, Skipper Tommy," said my mother, laying a fond hand on my head.

"Have you, now, mum!" cried the skipper, with a wink. "'Tis hard t' believe. He've been huntin' gulls' nests in parlous places on the cliff o' the Watchman, I'm thinkin'."

"'Tis worse than that."

"Dear man! Worse than that, says you? Then he've took the punt beyond the Gate all by hisself."

"'Tis even worse than that. He's not pleased with the dear Lord's world."

Skipper Tommy stopped dead and stared me in the eye—but not coldly, you must know; just in mild wonder, in which, it may be, was mixed some admiration, as though he, too, deep in his guileless old heart, had had some doubt which he dared not entertain.

"Ay," said I, loftily, "He've not made flowers enough t' suit *my* taste."

Skipper Tommy rubbed his nose in a meditative way. "Well," he drawled, "He haven't made many, true enough. I'm not sayin' He mightn't have made more. But He've done very well. They's enough —oh, ay, they's enough t' get along with. For, look you! lad, they's no real *need* o' any more. 'Twas wonderful kind of Un," he went on, swept away by a flood of good feeling, as often happened, "t' make even one little flower. Sure, He didn't *have* t' do it. He just went an' done it for love of us. Ay," he repeated, delighting himself with this new thought of his Lord's goodness, "'twas wonderful kind o' the Lard t' take so much trouble as that!"

My mother was looking deep into Skipper Tommy's eyes as though she saw some lovely thing therein.

"Ay," said I, "'twas fair kind; but I'm wishin' He'd been a bit more free."

My mother smiled at that. Then, "And my son," she said, in the way of one poking fun, "would have *flour* grow out of the ground!"

"An' did he say that!" cried Skipper Tommy.

My mother laughed, and Skipper Tommy laughed uproariously, and loudly slapped his thick thigh; and I felt woefully foolish, and wondered much what depth of ignorance I had betrayed, but I laughed, too, because Skipper Tommy laughed so heartily and opened his great mouth so wide; and we were all very merry for a time. At last, while I wondered, I thought that, perhaps, flour *did* grow, after all—though, for the life of me, I could not tell how—and that my mother and Skipper Tommy knew it well enough; whereupon I laughed the merrier.

"Come, look you!" then said Skipper Tommy, gently taking the lobe of my ear between his thick, hard thumb and forefinger. "Don't you go thinkin' you could make better worlds than the Lard. Why, lad, 'tis but *play* for *Him! He've* no trouble makin' a world! I'm thinkin' He've made more than one," he added, his voice changing to a knowing whisper. "'Tis my own idea, but," now sagely, "I'm thinkin' He did. 'Tis like that this was the first, an' He done better when He got His hand in. Oh, ay, nar a doubt He done better with the rest! But He done wonderful well with this one. When you're so old

as me, lad, you'll know that though the Lard made few flowers He put a deal o' time an' labour on the harbours; an' when you're beatin' up t' the Gate, lad, in a gale o' wind—an' when you thinks o' the quiet place t'other side o' Frothy Point—you'll know the Lard done well by all the folk o' this world when He made safe harbours instead o' wastin' His time on flowers. Ay, lad, 'tis a wonderful well built world; an' you'll know it—then!"

We turned homeward—down the long road over the shoulder of the Watchman; for the evening was drawing near.

"They's times," said Skipper Tommy, giving his nose a puzzled tweak, "when I wonders how He done it. 'Tis fair beyond me! I wonders a deal, now, mum," turning to my mother, his face lighting with interest, "about they stars. Now, mum," smiling wistfully, "I wonders . . . I wonders . . . how He stuck un up there in the sky. Ah," with a long sigh, "I'd sure like t' know that! An' wouldn't you, mum? Ecod! but I *would* like t' know that! 'Twould be worth while, I'm thinkin'. I'm wishin' I could find out. But, hut!" he cried, with a laugh which yet rang strangely sad in my ears, "'tis none o' my business. 'Twould be a queer thing, indeed, if men went pryin' into the Lard's secrets. He'd fix un, I 'low—He'd snarl un all up—He'd let un think theirselves

wise an' guess theirselves mad! That's what He'd do. But, now," falling again into a wistful, dreaming whisper, "I wonders . . . wonders . . . how He *does* stick them stars up there. I'm thinkin' I'll try t' think that out—some day—so people could know, an' wouldn't have t' wonder no more. I—wonders—if I could!"

We walked on in silence—down the last slope, and along the rocky path to Trader's Cove; and never a word was spoken. When we came to the turn to our house we bade the skipper good-evening.

"Don't you be forgettin'," he said, tipping up my face with a finger under my chin, "that you'll soon be thinkin' more o' harbours than o' flowers."

I laughed.

"But, ecod!" he broke out, violently rubbing his nose, until I was fairly concerned for it, so red did it turn, "that was a wonderful good idea about the flour!"

My mother looked at him sharply; then her eyes twinkled, and she hid a smile behind her hand.

"'*Twould* be a good thing t' have it grow," the old man continued. "'Twould be far better than —than—well, now—makin' it the way they does. Ecod!" he concluded, letting his glance fall in bewilderment on the ground, "I wonders how they *does* make flour. I wonders . . . wonders . . .

where they gets the stuff an'—an'—how they makes it!"

He went off, wondering still; and my mother and I went slowly home, and sat in the broad window of our house, which overlooked the harbour and fronted the flaring western sky; and then first she told me of the kind green world beyond.

III

IN THE HAVEN of HER ARMS

THERE was a day not far distant—my father had told my mother with a touch of impatience that it *must* come for all sons—when Skipper Tommy took me with one of the twin lads in the punt to the Hook-an'-Line grounds to jig, for the traps were doing poorly with the fish, the summer was wasting and there was nothing for it but to take to hook and line: which my father's dealers heartily did, being anxious to add what fish they could to the catch, though in this slower way. And it was my first time beyond the Gate—and the sea seemed very vast and strange and sullen when we put out at dawn—and when the long day was near done the wind blew gray and angry from the north and spread a thickening mist over the far-off Watchman —and before night closed, all that Skipper Tommy had said of harbours and flowers came true in my heart.

"We'll be havin' t' beat up t' the Gate," said he, as he hauled in the grapnel.

"With all the wind she can carry," added little Jacky, bending to lift the mast into the socket.

In truth, yes—as it seemed to my unknowing mind: she had all the wind she could carry. The wind fretted the black sea until it broke all roundabout; and the punt heeled to the gusts and endlessly flung her bows up to the big waves; and the spray swept over us like driving rain, and was bitter cold; and the mist fell thick and swift upon the coast beyond. Jacky, forward with the jib-sheet in his capable little fist and the bail bucket handy, scowled darkly at the gale, being alert as a cat, the while; and the skipper, his mild smile unchanged by all the tumult, kept a hand on the mainsheet and tiller, and a keen, quiet eye on the canvas and on the vanishing rocks whither we were bound. And forth and back she went, back and forth, again and again, without end—beating up to harbour.

"Dear man!" said Skipper Tommy, with a glance at the vague black outline of the Watchman, "but 'tis a fine harbour!"

"'Tis that," sighed Jacky, wistfully, as a screaming little gust heeled the punt over; "an'—an'—I wisht we was there!"

Skipper Tommy laughed at his son.

"I does!" Jacky declared.

"I—I—I'm not so sure," I stammered, taking a tighter grip on the gunwale, "but I wisht we was—there—too."

"You'll be wishin' that often," said Skipper Tommy, pointedly, "if you lives t' be so old as me."

We wished it often, indeed, that day—while the wind blustered yet more wildly out of the north and the waves tumbled aboard our staggering little craft and the night came apace over the sea—and we have wished it often since that old time, have Jacky and I, God knows! I had the curious sensation of fear, I fancy—though I am loath to call it that—for the first time in my life; and I was very much relieved when, at dusk, we rounded the looming Watchman, ran through the white waters and thunderous confusion of the Gate, with the breakers leaping high on either hand, sharply turned Frothy Point and came at last into the ripples of Trader's Cove. Glad I was, you may be sure, to find my mother waiting on my father's wharf, and to be taken by the hand, and to be led up the path to the house, where there was spread a grand supper of fish and bread, which my sister had long kept waiting; and, after all, to be rocked in the broad window, safe in the haven of my mother's arms, while the last of the sullen light of day fled into the wilderness and all the world turned black.

"You'll be singin' for me, mum, will you not?" I whispered.

"And what shall I sing, lad?" said she.

"You knows, mum."

"I'm not so sure," said she. "Come, tell me!"

What should she sing? I knew well, at that moment, the assurance my heart wanted: we are a God-fearing people, and I was a child of that coast; and I had then first come in from a stormy sea. There is a song——

"'Tis, 'Jesus Saviour Pilot Me,'" I answered.

"I knew it all the time," said she; and,

> "'Jesus, Saviour, pilot me,
> Over life's tempestuous sea,'"

she sang, very softly—and for me alone—like a sweet whisper in my ear.

> "'Unknown waves before me roll,
> Hiding rock and treacherous shoal;
> Chart and compass came from Thee:
> Jesus, Saviour, pilot me!'"

"I was thinkin' o' that, mum, when we come through the Gate," said I. "Sure, I thought Skipper Tommy might miss the Way, an' get t'other side o' the Tooth, an' get in the Trap, an' go t' wreck on the Murderers, an'——"

"Hush, dear!" she whispered. "Sure, you've no cause to fear when the pilot knows the way."

The feeling of harbour—of escape and of shelter and brooding peace—was strong upon me while we

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sat rocking in the failing light. I have never since made harbour—never since come of a sudden from the toil and the frothy rage of the sea by night or day, but my heart has felt again the peace of that quiet hour—never once but blessed memory has given me once again the vision of myself, a little child, lying on my mother's dear breast, gathered close in her arms, while she rocked and softly sang of the tempestuous sea and a Pilot for the sons of men, still rocking, rocking, in the broad window of my father's house. I protest that I love my land, and have from that hour, barren as it is and as bitter the sea that breaks upon it; for I then learned —and still know—that it is as though the dear God Himself made harbours with wise, kind hands for such as have business in the wild waters of that coast. And I love my life—and go glad to the day's work —for I have learned, in the course of it and by the life of the man who came to us, that whatever the stress and fear of the work to be done there is yet for us all a refuge, which, by way of the heart, they find who seek.

And I fell asleep in my mother's arms, and by and by my big father came in and laughed tenderly to find me lying there; and then, as I have been told, laughing softly still they carried me up and flung me

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on my bed, flushed and wet and limp with sound slumber, where I lay like a small sack of flour, while together they pulled off my shoes and stockings and jacket and trousers and little shirt, and bundled me into my night-dress, and rolled me under the blanket, and tucked me in, and kissed me good-night.

When my mother's lips touched my cheek I awoke. "Is it you, mama?" I asked.

"Ay," said she; "'tis your mother, lad."

Her hand went swiftly to my brow, and smoothed back the tousled, wet hair.

"Is you kissed me yet?"

"Oh, ay!" said she.

"Kiss me again, please, mum," said I, "for I wants —t' make sure—you done it."

She kissed me again, very tenderly; and I sighed and fell asleep, content.

IV

THE SHADOW

WHEN the mail-boat left our coast to the long isolation of that winter my mother was even more tender with the scrawny plants in the five red pots on the window-shelf. On gray days, when our house and all the world lay in the soggy shadow of the fog, she fretted sadly for their health; and she kept feverish watch for a rift in the low, sad sky, and sighed and wished for sunlight. It mystified me to perceive the wistful regard she bestowed upon the stalks and leaves that thrived the illest—the soft touches for the yellowing leaves, and, at last, the tear that fell, when, withered beyond hope, they were plucked and cast away—and I asked her why she loved the sick leaves so; and she answered that she knew but would not tell me why. Many a time, too, at twilight, I surprised her sitting downcast by the window, staring out—and far—not upon the rock and sea of our harbour, but as though through the thickening shadows into some other place.

"What you lookin' at, mum?" I asked her, once.

"A glory," she answered.

"Glory!" said I. "They's no glory out there. The night falls. 'Tis all black an' cold on the hills. Sure, *I* sees no glory."

"'Tis not a glory, but a shadow," she whispered, "for you!"

Nor was I now ever permitted to see her in disarray, but always, as it seemed to me, fresh from my sister's clever hands, her hair laid smooth and shining, her simple gown starched crisp and sweetly smelling of the ironing board; and when I asked her why she was never but thus lovely, she answered, with a smile, that surely it pleased her son to find her always so: which, indeed, it did. I felt, hence, in some puzzled way, that this display was a design upon me, but to what end I could not tell. And there was an air of sad unquiet in the house: it occurred to my childish fancy that my mother was like one bound alone upon a long journey; and once, deep in the night, when I had long lain ill at ease in the shadow of this fear, I crept to her door to listen, lest she be already fled, and I heard her sigh and faintly complain; and then I went back to bed, very sad that my mother should be ailing, but now sure that she would not leave me.

Next morning my father leaned over our breakfast table and laid his broad hand upon my mother's

shoulder; whereupon she looked up smiling, as ever she did when that big man caressed her.

"I'll be havin' the doctor for you," he said.

She gave him a swift glance of warning—then turned her wide eyes upon me.

"Oh," said my father, "the lad knows you is sick. 'Tis no use tryin' t' keep it from un any more."

"Ay," I sobbed, pushing my plate away, for I was of a sudden no longer hungry, "I heared you cryin' las' night."

My sister came quickly to my side, and wound a soft arm about my neck, and drew my head close to her heart, and kissed me many times; and when she had soothed me I looked up and found my mother gloriously glad that I had cried.

"'Tis nothing," then she said, with a rush of tenderness for my grief. "'Tis not hard to bear. 'Tis ——"

"Ay, but," said my father, "I'll be havin' the doctor t' see you."

My mother pooh-poohed it all. The doctor? For her? Not she! She was not sick enough for *that!*

"I'm bent," said my father, doggedly, "on havin' that man."

"David," cried my mother, "I'll not have you do it!"

"I'll have my way of it," said my father. "I'm

bent on it, an' I'll be put off no longer. 'Tis no use, m'am—nar a bit! The doctor's comin' t' see you."

"Ah, well!" sighed my mother.

"Ay," said my father, "I'll have that man ashore when the mail-boat comes in the spring. 'Tis well on t' December now," he went on, "an' it may be we'll have an early break-up. Sure, if they's westerly winds in the spring, an' the ice clears away in good season, we'll be havin' the mail-boat north in May. Come, now! 'twill not be later than June, I 'low. An' I'll have that doctor ashore in a hurry, mark my words, when the anchor's down. That I will!"

"'Tis a long time," said my mother.

Every morning, thereafter, she said that she was better—always better—much, much better. 'Twas wonderful, she said, 'twas fair past making out, indeed, that she should so soon grow into a fine, hearty woman again; and 'twould be an easy matter, said she, for the mail-boat doctor to cure *her*—when he came. And she was now more discreet with her moods; not once did I catch her brooding alone, though more than once I lay in wait in dark corners or peered through the crack in the door; and she went smiling about the house, as of old—but yet not as of old; and I puzzled over the difference, but could not discover it. More often, now, at twilight, she lured me to her lap, where I was never loath to

go, great lad of nine years though I was; and she sat silent with me, rocking, rocking, while the deeper night came down—and she kissed me so often that I wondered she did not tire of it—and she stroked my brow and cheeks, and touched my eyes, and ran her finger-tips over my eyebrows and nose and lips, ay, and softly played with my lips—and at times she strained me so hard to her breast that I near complained of the embrace—and I was no more driven off to bed when my eyes grew heavy, but let lie in her arms, while we sat silent, rocking, rocking, until long, long after I had fallen asleep. And once, at the end of a sweet, strange hour, making believe to play, she gently pried my eyes wide open and looked far into their depths—so deep, so long, so searchingly, so strangely, that I waxed uneasy under the glance.

"Wh-wh-what—what you ——" I began, inarticulately.

"What am I looking for?" she interrupted, speaking quickly.

"Ay," I whimpered, for I was deeply agitated; "what you lookin' for?"

"For your heart," said she.

I did not know what she meant; and I wondered concerning the fancy she had, but did not ask, for there was that in her voice and eyes that made me very solemn.

"'Tis but a child's heart," she sighed, turning away. "'Tis but like the hearts," she whispered, "of all children. I cannot tell—I cannot tell," she sobbed, "and I want—oh, I want so much—to know!"

"Don't cry!" I pleaded, thrown into an agony by her tears, in the way of all children.

She sat me back in her lap. "Look in your mother's eyes, lad," said she, "and say after me this: 'My mother——'"

"'My mother——'" I repeated, very soberly.

"'Looked upon my heart——'"

"'Looked upon my heart——'" said I.

"'And found it brave——'"

"'An' found it brave——'"

"'And sweet——'"

"'An' sweet——'"

"'Willing for the day's work——'" said she.

"'Willing for the day's work——'" I repeated.

"'And harbouring no shameful hope.'"

"'An' harbouring—no shameful—hope.'"

Again and again she had me say it—until I knew it every word by heart.

"Ah," said she, at last, "but you'll forget!"

"No, no!" I cried. "I'll not forget. 'My mother looked upon my heart,'" I rattled, "'an' found it brave an' sweet, willing for the day's work

an' harboring no shameful hope.' I've not forgot! I've *not* forgot!"

"He'll forget," she whispered, but not to me, "like all children."

But I have not forgotten—I have not forgotten—I have never forgotten—that when I was a child my mother looked upon my heart and found it brave and sweet, willing for the day's work and harbouring no shameful hope.

The winter fell early and with ominous severity. Our bleak coast was soon too bitter with wind and frost and snow for the folk to continue in their poor habitations. They were driven in haste to the snugger inland tilts, which lay in a huddle at the Lodge, far up Twisted Arm, in the blessed proximity of fire-wood—there to trap and sleep in hardly mitigated misery until the kindlier spring days should once again invite them to the coast. My father, the only trader on forty miles of our coast, as always dealt them salt beef and flour and tea with a free hand, until, at last, the storehouses were swept clean of food, save sufficient for our own wants: his great heart hopeful that the catch of next season, and the honest hearts of the folk, and the mysterious favor of the Lord, would all conspire to repay him. And so they departed, bag and baggage, youngsters

and dogs; and the waste of our harbour and of the infinite roundabout was left white and silent, as of death itself. But we dwelt on in our house under the sheltering Watchman; for my father, being a small trader, was better off than they—though I would not have you think him of consequence elsewhere—and had builded a stout house, double-windowed, lined with felt and wainscotted with canvas, so that but little frost formed on the walls of the living rooms, and that only in the coldest weather.

"'Tis cozy enough," said my father, chucking my mother under the chin, "even for a maid a man might cotch up Boston way!"

Presently came Skipper Tommy Lovejoy by rollicking dog-team from the Lodge to inquire after my mother's health—to cheer us, it may be, I'm thinking, with his hearty way, his vast hope, his odd fancies, his ruddy, twinkling face. Most we laughed when he described his plan (how seriously conceived there was no knowing) for training whales to serve as tugboats in calms and adverse winds. It appeared, too, that a similar recital had been trying to the composure of old Tom Tot, of our harbour, who had searched the Bible for seven years to discover therein a good man of whom it was said that he laughed, and, failing utterly, had thereupon vowed never again to commit the sin of levity.

"Sure, I near fetched un," said Skipper Tommy, gleefully, "with me whales. I come near makin' Tom Tot break that scandalous vow, zur, indeed I did! He got wonderful purple in the face, an' choked in a fearsome way, when I showed un my steerin' gear for the beast's tail, but, as I'm sad t' say, zur, he managed t' keep it in without bustin'. But I'll get un yet, zur—oh, ay, zur—just leave un t' me! Ecod! zur, I'm thinkin' he'll capsize with all hands when I tells un I'm t' have a wheel-house on the forward deck o' that wha-a-ale!"

But the old man soon forgot all about his whales, as he had forgotten to make out the strange way the Lord had discovered to fasten His stars to the sky; moved by a long contemplation of my mother's frailty, he had a nobler inspiration.

"'Tis sad, lass," he said, his face aquiver with sympathy, "t' think that we've but one doctor t' cure the sick, an' him on the mail-boat. 'Tis *wonderful* sad t' think o' that! 'Tis a hard case," he went on, "but if a man only thunk hard enough he'd find a way t' mend it. Sure, what *ought* t' be mended *can* be mended. 'Tis the way o' the world. If a man only thinks hard an' thinks sensible, he'll find a way, zur, every time. 'Tis easy t' think hard, but 'tis sometimes hard," he added, "t' think t' the point."

We were silent while he continued lost in deep and puzzled thought.

"Ecod!" he burst out. "I got it!"

"Have you, now?" cried my father, half amused, half amazed.

"Just this minute, zur," said the skipper, in a glow of delighted astonishment. "It come t' me all t' oncet."

"An' what is it?"

"'Tis a sort o' book, zur!"

"A book?"

"Ay, 'tis just a book. Find out all the cures in the world an' put un in a book. Get the doctor-women's, an' the healers', an' the real doctor's, an' put un right in a book. Has you got the dip-theria? Ask the book what t' do. 'Dip-theria?' says the book t' you. 'Well, that's sad. Tie a split herring round your neck.' S'pose you got the salt-water sores. What do you do, then? Why, turn t' the book. 'Oh, 'tis nothin' t' cure *that*,' says the book. 'Wear a brass chain on your wrist, lad, an' you'll be troubled no more.' Take it, now, when you got blood-poison in the hand. What is you t' do, you wants t' know? 'Blood-poison in the hand?' says the book. 'Good gracious, that's awful! Cut off your hand.' 'Twould be a wonderful good work," the skipper concluded, "t' make a book like that!"

It appeared to me that it would.

"I wonder," the skipper went on, staring at the fire, a little smile playing upon his face, "if *I* couldn't do that! 'Twould surely be a thing worth doin'. I wonder—I wonder—if I couldn't manage—somehow —t' do it!"

We said nothing; for he was not thinking of us, any more, as we knew—but only dreaming of the new and beneficent work which had of a sudden appeared to him.

"But I isn't able t' write," he muttered, at last. "I—I—*wisht I could!*"

"'Twould be a wonderful fine work for a man t' do," said my father.

"'Tis a wonder, now," said Skipper Tommy, looking up with a bright face, "that no one ever thought o' doin' that afore. T' my mind," he added, much puzzled, "'tis very queer, indeed, that they's nar a man in all the world t' think o' that—but *me!*"

My mother smiled.

"I'm thinkin' I'll just *have* t' try," Skipper Tommy went on, frowning anxiously. "But, ecod!" he cried, "maybe the Lard wouldn't like it. Now, maybe, He wants us men t' mind our business. Maybe, He'd say, 'You keep your finger out o' My pie. Don't you go makin' no books about cures.' But, oh, no!" with the overflow of fine feeling which

so often came upon him. "Why, *He* wouldn't mind a little thing like that. Sure, I wouldn't mind it, meself! 'You go right ahead, lad,' He'd say, 'an' try t' work your cures. Don't you be afeared o' Me. *I'll* not mind. But, lad,' He'd say, 'when I wants my way I just got t' *have* it. Don't you forget that. Don't you go thinkin' you can have *your* way afore I has *Mine*. You just trust Me t' do what's right. I know My business. I'm *used* t' running worlds. I'm wonderful sorry,' He'd say, 't' have t' make you feel bad; but they's times, b'y,' He'd say, 'when I really *got* t' have My way.' Oh, no," Skipper Tommy concluded, "the Lard wouldn't mind a poor man's tryin' t' make a book like that! An' I thinks I'll just *have* t' try."

"Sure, Skipper Tommy," said I, "I'll help you."

Skipper Tommy stared at me in great amaze.

"Ay," said my mother, "Davy has learned to write."

"That I have," I boasted; "an' I'll help you make that book."

"'Tis the same," cried Skipper Tommy, slapping his thigh "as if 'twas writ already!"

After a long time, my mother spoke. "You're always wanting to do some good thing, Skipper Tommy, are you not?" said she.

"Well," he admitted, his face falling, "I thinks and wonders a deal, 'tis true, but somehow I don't seem t'——"

"Ay?" my father asked.

"Get—nowhere—much!"

Very true: but, even then, there was a man on the way to help him.

V

MARY

IN the dead of that winter, great storms of wind and snow raged for days together, so that it was unsafe to venture ten fathoms from the door, and the glass fell to fifty degrees (and more) below zero, where the liquid behaved in a fashion so sluggish that 'twould not have surprised us had it withdrawn into the bulb altogether, never to reappear in a sphere of agreeable activity. By night and day we kept the fires roaring (my father and Skipper Tommy standing watch and watch in the night) and might have gone at ease, cold as it was, had we not been haunted by the fear that a conflagration, despite our watchfulness, would of a sudden put us at the mercy of the weather, which would have made an end of us, every one, in a night. But when the skipper had wrought us into a cheerful mood, the wild, white days sped swift enough—so fast, indeed, that it was quite beyond me to keep count of them: for he was marvellous at devising adventures out-of-doors and pastimes within. At length, however, he said that he must be off to the Lodge, else Jacky and Timmie,

the twins, who had been left to fend for themselves, would expire of longing for his return.

"An' I'll be takin' Davy back with me, mum," said he to my mother, not daring, however, to meet her eye to eye with the proposal, "for the twins is wantin' him sore."

"Davy!" cried my mother. "Surely, Skipper Tommy, you're not thinking to have Davy back with you!"

Skipper Tommy ventured to maintain that I would be the better of a run in the woods, which would (as he ingeniously intimated) restore the blood to my cheeks: whereupon my mother came at once to his way of thinking, and would hear of no delay, but said—and that in a fever of anxiety—that I must be off in the morning, for she would not rest until I was put in the way of having healthful sport with lads of my age. So, that night, my sister made up three weeks' rations for me from our store (with something extra in the way of tinned beef and a pot of jam as a gift from me to the twins); also, she mended my sleeping-bag, in which my sprouting legs had kicked a hole, and got out the big black wolf-skin, for bed covering in case of need. And by the first light of the next day we loaded the komatik, harnessed the joyful dogs and set out with a rush, the skipper's long whip cracking a jolly farewell as

we went swinging over the frozen harbour to the Arm.

"Hi, hi, b'y!" the skipper shouted to the dogs.

Crack! went the whip, high over the heads of the pack. The dogs yelped. "Hi, hi!" screamed I. And on we sped, raising a dust of crisp snow in our wake. It was a famous pack. Fox, the new leader, was a mighty, indomitable fellow, and old Wolf, in the rear, had a sharp eye for lagging heels, which he snapped, in a flash, whenever a trace was let slack. What with Fox and Wolf and the skipper's long whip and my cries of encouragement there was no let up. On we went, coursing over the level stretches, bumping over rough places, swerving 'round the turns. It was a glorious ride. The day was clear, the air frosty, the pace exhilarating. The blood tingled in every part of me. I was sorry when we rounded Pipestem Point, and the huddled tilts of the Lodge, half buried in snow, came into view. But, half an hour later, in Skipper Tommy's tilt, I was glad that the distance had been no greater, for then the twins were helping me thaw out my cheeks and the tip of my nose, which had been frozen on the way.

That night the twins and I slept together in the cock-loft like a litter of puppies.

"Beef!" sighed Jacky, the last thing before falling asleep. "Think o' that, Timmie!"

"An' jam!" said Timmie.

They gave me a nudge to waken me. "Thanks, Davy," said they both.

Then I fell asleep.

Our folk slept a great deal at the Lodge. They seemed to want to have the winter pass without knowing more than they could help of the various pangs of it—like the bears. But, when the weather permitted them to stir without, they trapped for fox and lynx, and hunted (to small purpose) with antiquated guns, and cut wood, if they were in the humour; and whatever necessity compelled them to do, and whatever they had to eat (since there was at least enough of it), they managed to have a rollicking time of it, as you would not suppose, without being told. The tilts were built of slim logs, caulked with moss; and there was but one room—and that a bare one—with bunks at one end for the women and a cock-loft above for the men. The stove was kept at red heat, day and night, but, notwithstanding, there was half an inch of frost on the walls and great icicles under the bunks: extremes of temperature were thus to be found within a very narrow compass. In the evening, when we were all gathered close about the stove, we passed the jolliest hours; for it was then that the folk came in, and tales were told, and (what

was even more to our taste) the "spurts at religion" occurred.

When the argument concerned the pains of hell, Mary, Tom Tot's daughter, who was already bound out to service to the new manager of the store at Wayfarer's Tickle (expected by the first mail-boat), would slip softly in to listen.

"What you thinkin' about?" I whispered, once.

She sat remote from the company, biting her finger nails, staring, meanwhile, from speaker to speaker, with eyes that were pitifully eager.

"Hell," she answered.

I was taken aback by that. "Hell, Mary?" I exclaimed.

"Ay, Davy," she said, with a shudder, "I'm thinkin' about hell."

"What for?" said I. "Sure, 'twill do you no good to think about hell."

"I got to," said she. "I'm goin' there!"

Skipper Tommy explained, when the folk had gone, that Mary, being once in a south port of our coast, had chanced to hear a travelling parson preach a sermon. "An'," said he, "'tis too bad that young man preached about damnation, for 'tis the only sermon she ever heared, an' she isn't seemin' t' get over it." After that I tried to persuade Mary that she would not go to hell, but quite dismally failed—and

not only failed, but was soon thinking that I, too, was bound that way. When I expressed this fear, Mary took a great fancy to me, and set me to getting from Skipper Tommy a description of the particular tortures, as he conceived they were to be inflicted; for, said she, he was a holy man, and could tell what she so much wished to know. Skipper Tommy took me on his knee, and spoke long and tenderly to me, so that I have never since feared death or hell; but his words, being repeated, had no effect upon Mary, who continued still to believe that the unhappy fate awaited her, because of some sin she was predestined to commit, or, if not that, because of her weight of original sin.

"Oh, Davy, I got t' go!" she moaned, tearing one of her nails to the quick.

"No, no!" I cried. "The Lard 'll never be so mean t' you."

"You don't know Him," she said, mysteriously. "You don't know what He's up to."

"Bother Him!" I exclaimed, angered that mortals should thus be made miserable by interference. "I wisht He'd leave us be!"

"Hush!" she said, horrified.

"What's He gone an' done, now?" I demanded.

"He've not elected me," she whispered, solemnly. "He've left *me* with the goats."

And so, happily, I accumulated another grudge against this misconception of the dear Lord, which Skipper Tommy's sweet philosophy and the jolly companionship of the twins could not eliminate for many days. But eventually the fresh air and laughter and tenderness restored my complacency. I forgot all about hell; 'twas more interesting to don my racquets and make the round of the fox traps with the twins, or to play pranks on the neighbours, or to fashion curious masques and go mummering from tilt to tilt. In the end, I emerged from the unfortunate mood with one firm conviction, founded largely, I fear, upon a picture which hung by my bed at home: that portraying a rising from the dead, the grave below, a golden, cloudy heaven above, wherefrom a winged angel had descended to take the hand of the free, enraptured soul. And my conviction was this, that, come what might to the souls of the wicked, the souls of the good were upon death robed in white and borne aloft to some great bliss, yet lingered, by the way, to throw back a tender glance.

I had never seen death come.

In three weeks my rations were exhausted, and, since it would have been ungenerous in me to consume Skipper Tommy's food, I had the old man harness the dogs and take me home. My only re-

gret was that my food did not last until Skipper Tommy had managed to make Tom Tot laugh. Many a night the old man had tried to no purpose, for Tom Tot would stare him stolidly in the eye, however preposterous the tale to be told. The twins and I had waited in vain—ready to explode at the right moment: but never having the opportunity. The last assault on Tom Tot's composure had been disastrous to the skipper. When, with highly elaborate detail, he had once more described his plan for training whales, disclosing, at last, his intention of having a wheel-house on what he called the forward deck ——

"What about the fo'c's'le?" Tom Tot solemnly asked.

"Eh?" gasped the skipper. "Fo'c's'le?"

"Ay," said Tom Tot, in a melancholy drawl. "Isn't you give a thought t' the crew?"

Skipper Tommy was nonplussed.

"Well," sighed Tom, "I s'pose you'll be havin' t' fit up Jonah's quarters for them poor men!"

At home, in the evening, while my mother and father and sister and I were together in the glow of the fire, we delighted to plan the entertainment of the doctor who was coming to cure my mother. He must have the armchair from the best room below,

my mother said, that he might sit in comfort, as all doctors should, while he felt her pulse; he must have a refreshing nip from the famous bottle of Jamaica rum, which had lain in untroubled seclusion since before I was born, waiting some occasion of vast importance; and he must surely not take her unaware in a slatternly moment, but must find her lying on the pillows, wearing her prettiest night-gown, which was thereupon newly washed and ironed and stowed away in the bottom drawer of the bureau against his unexpected coming. But while the snow melted from the hills, and the folk returned to the coast for the seal fishing, and the west winds carried the ice to sea, and we waited day by day for the mail-boat, our spirits fell, for my mother was then fast failing. And I discovered this strange circumstance: that while her strength withered, her hope grew large, and she loved to dwell upon the things she would do when the doctor had made her well; and I wondered why that was, but puzzled to no purpose.

VI

The MAN on The MAIL-BOAT

IT was in the dusk of a wet night of early June, with the sea in a tumble and the wind blowing fretfully from the west of north, that the mail-boat made our harbour. For three weeks we had kept watch for her, but in the end we were caught unready—the lookouts in from the Watchman, my father's crew gone home, ourselves at evening prayer in the room where my mother lay abed. My father stopped dead in his petition when the first hoarse, muffled blast of the whistle came uncertain from the sea, and my own heart fluttered and stood still, until, rising above the rush of the wind and the noise of the rain upon the panes, the second blast broke the silence within. Then with a shaking cry of "Lord God, 'tis she!" my father leaped from his knees, ran for his sea-boots and oilskins, and shouted from below for my sister to make ready his lantern. But, indeed, he had to get his lantern for himself; for my mother, who was now in a flush of excitement, speaking high and incoherently, would have my sister stay with her to make ready for the coming of the doctor

—to dress her hair, and tidy the room, and lay out the best coverlet, and help on with the dainty night-gown.

"Ay, mother," my sister said, laughing, to quiet her, "I'll not leave you. Sure, my father's old enough t' get his own lantern ready."

"The doctor's come!" I shouted, contributing a lad's share to the excitement. "He've come! Hooray! He've come!"

"Quick, Bessie!" cried my mother. "He'll be here before we know it. And my hair is in a fearful tangle. The looking-glass, lassie——"

I left them in the thick of this housewifely agitation. Donning my small oil-skins, as best as I could without my kind sister's help—and I shed impatient tears over the stiff button-holes, which my fingers would not manage—I stumbled down the path to the wharf, my exuberant joy escaping, the while, in loud halloos. There I learned that the mail-boat lay at anchor off the Gate, and, as it appeared, would not come in from the sea, but would presently be off to Wayfarer's Tickle, to the north, where she would harbour for the night. The lanterns were shining cheerily in the dark of the wharf; and my father was speeding the men who were to take the great skiff out for the spring freight—barrels of flour and pork and the like—and roundly berating them, every one,

in a way which surprised them into unwonted activity. Perceiving that my father's temper and this mad bustle were to be kept clear of by wise lads, I slipped into my father's punt, which lay waiting by the wharf-stairs; and there, when the skiff was at last got underway, I was found by my father and Skipper Tommy Lovejoy.

"Ashore with you, Davy, lad!" said my father. "There'll be no room for the doctor. He'll be wantin' the stern seat for hisself."

"Leave the boy bide where he is," Skipper Tommy put in. "Sure, he'll do no harm, an'—an'—why, zur," as if that were sufficient, "he's *wantin'* t' go!"

I kept silent—knowing well enough that Skipper Tommy was the man to help a lad to his desire.

"Ay," said my father, "but I'm wantin' the doctor t' be comfortable when he comes ashore."

"He'll be comfortable enough, zur. The lad'll sit in the bow an' trim the boat. Pass the lantern t' Davy, zur, an' come aboard."

My father continued to grumble his concern for the doctor's comfort; but he leaned over to pat my shoulder while Skipper Tommy pushed off: for he loved his little son, did my big father—oh, ay, indeed, he did! We were soon past the lumbering skiff—and beyond Frothy Point—and out of the

Gate—and in the open sea, where the wind was blowing smartly and the rain was flying in gusts. My father hailed the steamer's small-boat, inbound with the mail, to know if the doctor was in verity aboard; and the answer, though but half caught, was such that they bent heartily to the oars, and the punt gave a great leap and went staggering through the big waves in a way to delight one's very soul. Thus, in haste, we drew near the steamer, which lay tossing ponderously in the ground-swell, her engines panting, her lamps bright, her many lights shining from port-hole and deck—all so cozy and secure in the dirty night: so strange to our bleak coast!

At the head of the ladder the purser stood waiting to know about landing the freight.

"Is you goin' on?" my father asked.

"Ay—t' Wayfarer's Tickle, when we load your skiff."

"'Twill be alongside in a trice. But my wife's sick. I'm wantin' t' take the doctor ashore."

"He's aft in the smokin'-room. You'd best speak t' the captain first. Hold her? Oh, sure, *he'll* hold her all night, for sickness!"

They moved off forward. Then Skipper Tommy took my hand—or, rather, I took his; for I was made ill at ease by the great, wet sweep of the deck, glistening with reflections of bright lights, and by the

throng of strange men, and by the hiss of steam and the clank of iron coming from the mysterious depths below. He would show me the cabin, said he, where there was unexampled splendour to delight in; but when we came to a little house on the after deck, where men were lounging in a thick fog of tobacco smoke, I would go no further (though Skipper Tommy said that words were spoken not meet for the ears of lads to hear); for my interest was caught by a giant pup, which was not like the pups of our harbour but a lean, long-limbed, short-haired dog, with heavy jaws and sagging, blood-red eyelids. At a round table, whereon there lay a short dog-whip, his master sat at cards with a stout little man in a pea-jacket—a loose-lipped, blear-eyed, flabby little fellow, but, withal, hearty in his own way—and himself cut a curious figure, being grotesquely ill-featured and ill-fashioned, so that one rebelled against the sight of him.

A gust of rain beat viciously upon the windows and the wind ran swishing past.

"'Tis a dirty night," said the dog's master, shuffling nervously in his seat.

At this the dog lifted his head with a sharp snarl: whereupon, in a flash, the man struck him on the snout with the butt of the whip.

"That's for you!" he growled.

The dog regarded him sullenly—his upper lip still lifted from his teeth.

"Eh?" the man taunted. "Will you have another?"

The dog's head subsided upon his paws; but his eyes never once left his master's face—and the eyes were alert, steady, hard as steel.

"You're l'arnin'," the man drawled.

But the dog had learned no submission, but, if anything, only craft, as even I, a child, could perceive; and I marvelled that the man could conceive himself to be winning the mastery of that splendid brute. 'Twas no way to treat a dog of that disposition. It had been a wanton blow—taken with not so much as a whimper. Mastery? Hut! The beast was but biding his time. And I wished him well in the issue. "Ecod!" thought I, with heat. "I hopes he gets a good grip o' the throat!" Whether or not, at the last, it was the throat, I do not know; but I do know the brutal tragedy of that man's end, for, soon, he came rough-shod into our quiet life, and there came a time when I was hot on his trail, and rejoiced, deep in the wilderness, to see the snow all trampled and gory. But the telling of that is for a later page; the man had small part in the scene immediately approaching: it was another. When the wind and rain again beat angrily upon the ship,

his look of triumph at once gave place to cowardly concern; and he repeated:

"'Tis a dirty night."

"Ay," said the other, and, frowning, spread his cards before him. "What do you make, Jagger?"

My father came in—and with him a breath of wet, cool air, which I caught with delight.

"Ha!" he cried, heartily, advancing upon the flabby little man, "we been waitin' a long time for *you*, doctor. Thank God, you've come, at last!"

"Fifteen, two——" said the doctor.

My father started. "I'm wantin' you t' take a look at my poor wife," he went on, renewing his heartiness with an effort. "She've been wonderful sick all winter, an' we been waitin'——"

"Fifteen, four," said the doctor; "fifteen, six——"

"Doctor," my father said, touching the man on the shoulder, while Jagger smiled some faint amusement, "does you hear?"

It was suddenly very quiet in the cabin.

"Fifteen, eight——" said the doctor.

My father's voice changed ominously. "Is you listenin', zur?" he asked.

"Sick, is she?" said the doctor. "Fifteen, ten. I've got you, Jagger, sure . . . 'Tis no fit night for a man to go ashore . . . Fifteen, ten, did I say? and one for his nibs . . . Go

fetch her aboard, man . . . And two for his heels——"

My father laid his hand over the doctor's cards. "Was you sayin'," he asked, "t' fetch her aboard?"

The doctor struck the hand away.

"Was you sayin'," my father quietly persisted, "t' fetch her aboard?"

I knew my father for a man of temper; and, now, I wondered that his patience lasted.

"Damme!" the doctor burst out. "Think I'm going ashore in this weather? If you want me to see her now, go fetch her aboard."

My father coughed—then fingered the neck-band of his shirt.

"I wants t' get this here clear in my mind," he said, slowly. "Is you askin' me t' fetch that sick woman aboard this here ship?"

The doctor leaned over the table to spit.

"Has I got it right, zur?"

In the pause the spectators softly withdrew to the further end of the cabin.

"If he won't fetch her aboard, Jagger," said the doctor, turning to the dog's master, "she'll do very well, I'll be bound, till we get back from the north. Eh, Jagger? If he cared very much, he'd fetch her aboard, wouldn't he?"

Jagger laughed.

"Ay, she'll do very well," the doctor repeated, now addressing my father, "till we get back. I'll take a look at her then."

I saw the color rush into my father's face. Skipper Tommy laid a restraining hand on his shoulder.

"Easy, now, Skipper David!" he muttered.

"Is I right," said my father, bending close to the doctor's face, "in thinkin' you says you *won't* come ashore?"

The doctor shrugged his shoulders.

"Is I right," pursued my father, his voice rising, "in thinkin' the gov'ment pays you t' tend the sick o' this coast?"

"That's my business," flashed the doctor. "That's my business, sir!"

Jagger looked upon my father's angry face and smiled.

"Is we right, doctor," said Skipper Tommy, "in thinkin' you knows she lies desperate sick?"

"Damme!" cried the doctor. "I've heard that tale before. You're a pretty set, you are, to try to play on a man's feelings like that. But you can't take *me* in. No, you can't," he repeated, his loose under-lip trembling. "You're a pretty set, you are. But you can't come it over me. Don't you go blustering, now! You can't come your bluster on me. Understand? You try any bluster on me, and,

by heaven! I'll let every man of your harbour die in his tracks. I'm the doctor, here, I want you to know. And I'll not go ashore in weather like this."

My father deliberately turned to wave Skipper Tommy and me out of the way: then laid a heavy hand on the doctor's shoulder.

"You'll not come?"

"Damned if I will!"

"By God!" roared my father. "I'll take you!"

At once, the doctor sought to evade my father's grasp, but could not, and, being unwise, struck him on the breast. My father felled him. The man lay in a flabby heap under the table, roaring lustily that he was being murdered; but so little sympathy did his plight extract, that, on the contrary, every man within happy reach, save Jagger and Skipper Tommy, gave him a hearty kick, taking no pains, it appeared, to choose the spot with mercy. As for Jagger, he had snatched up his whip, and was now raining blows on the muzzle of the dog, which had taken advantage of the uproar to fly at his legs. In this confusion, the Captain flung open the door and strode in. He was in a fuming rage; but, being no man to take sides in a quarrel, sought no explanation, but took my father by the arm and hurried him without, promising him redress, the while, at an-

other time. Thus presently we found ourselves once more in my father's punt, pushing out from the side of the steamer, which was already underway, chugging noisily.

"Hush, zur!" said Skipper Tommy to my father. "Curse him no more, zur. The good Lard, who made us, made him, also."

My father cursed the harder.

"Stop," cried the skipper, "or I'll be cursin' him, too, zur. God made that man, I tells you. He *must* have gone an' made that man."

"I hopes He'll damn him, then," said I.

"God knowed what He was doin' when he made that man," the skipper persisted, continuing in faith against his will. "I tells you I'll *not* doubt His wisdom. He made that man . . . He made that man . . . He made that man . . ."

To this refrain we rowed into harbour.

We found my mother's room made very neat, and very grand, too, I thought, with the shaded lamp and the great armchair from the best-room below; and my mother, now composed, but yet flushed with expectation, was raised on many snow-white pillows, lovely in the fine gown, with one thin hand, wherein she held a red geranium, lying placid on the coverlet.

"I am ready, David," she said to my father.

There was the sound of footsteps in the hall below. It was Skipper Tommy, as I knew.

"Is that he?" asked my mother. "Bring him up, David. I am quite ready."

My father still stood silent and awkward by the door of the room.

"David," said my poor mother, her voice breaking with sudden alarm, "have you been talking much with him? What has he told you, David? I'm not so very sick, am I?"

"Well, lass," said my father, "'tis a great season for all sorts o' sickness—an' the doctor is sick abed hisself—an' he—couldn't—come."

"Poor man!" sighed my mother. "But he'll come ashore on the south'ard trip."

"No, lass—no; I fear he'll not."

"Poor man!"

My mother turned her face from us. She trembled, once, and sighed, and then lay very quiet. I knew in my childish way that her hope had fled with ours —that, now, remote from our love and comfort—alone—all alone—she had been brought face to face with the last dread prospect. There was the noise of rain on the panes and wind without, and the heavy tread of Skipper Tommy's feet, coming up the stair, but no other sound. But Skipper Tommy, entering now, moved a chair to my mother's bedside, and laid

a hand on hers, his old face illumined by his unfailing faith in the glory and wisdom of his God.

"Hush!" he said. "Don't you go gettin' scared lass. Don't you go gettin' scared at—the thing that's comin'—t' you. 'Tis nothin' t' fear," he went on, gloriously confident. "'Tis not hard, I'm sure—the Lard's too kind for that. He just lets us think it is, so He can give us a lovely surprise, when the time comes. Oh, no, 'tis not *hard!* 'Tis but like wakin' up from a troubled dream. 'Tis like wakin' t' the sunlight of a new, clear day. Ah, 'tis a pity us all can't wake with you t' the beauty o' the morning! But the dear Lard is kind. There comes an end t' all the dreamin'. He takes our hand. 'The day is broke,' says He. 'Dream no more, but rise, child o' Mine, an' come into the sunshine with Me.' 'Tis only that that's comin' t' you—only His gentle touch—an' the waking. Hush! Don't you go gettin' scared. 'Tis a lovely thing—that's comin' t' you!"

"I'm not afraid," my mother whispered, turning. "I'm not afraid, Skipper Tommy. But I'm sad—oh I'm sad—to have to leave ——"

She looked tenderly upon me.

VII

The WOMAN from WOLF COVE

MY mother lay thus abandoned for seven days. It was very still and solemn in the room—and there was a hush in all the house; and there was a mystery, which even the break of day could not dissolve, and a shadow, which the streaming sunlight could not drive away. Beyond the broad window of her room, the hills of Skull Island and God's Warning stood yellow in the spring sunshine, rivulets dripping from the ragged patches of snow which yet lingered in the hollows; and the harbour water rippled under balmy, fragrant winds from the wilderness; and workaday voices, strangely unchanged by the solemn change upon our days, came drifting up the hill from my father's wharves; and, ay, indeed, all the world of sea and land was warm and wakeful and light of heart, just as it used to be. But within, where were the shadow and the mystery, we walked on tiptoe and spoke in whispers, lest we offend the spirit which had entered in.

By day my father was occupied with the men of

the place, who were then anxiously fitting out for the fishing season, which had come of a sudden with the news of a fine sign at Battle Harbour. But my mother did not mind, but, rather, smiled, and was content to know that he was about his business—as men must be, whatever may come to pass in the house—and that he was useful to the folk of our harbour, whom she loved. And my dear sister—whose heart and hands God fashioned with kind purpose—gave full measure of tenderness for both; and my mother was grateful for that, as she ever was for my sister's loving kindness to her and to me and to us all.

One night, being overwrought by sorrow, it may be, my father said that he would have the doctor-woman from Wolf Cove to help my mother.

"For," said he, "I been thinkin' a deal about she, o' late, an' they's no tellin' that she wouldn't do you good."

My mother raised her eyebrows. "The doctor-woman!" cried she. "Why, David!"

"Ay," said my father, looking away, "I s'pose 'tis great folly in me t' think it. But they isn't no one else t' turn to."

And that was unanswerable.

"There seems to be no one else," my mother admitted. "But, David—the doctor-woman?"

"They *does* work cures," my father pursued. "I'm

not knowin' *how* they does ; but they does, an' that's all I'm sayin'. Tim Budderly o' the Arm told me—an' 'twas but an hour ago—that she charmed un free o' fits."

"I have heard," my mother mused, "that they work cures. And if——"

"They's no knowin' what she can do," my father broke in, my mother now listening eagerly. "An' I just wish you'd leave me go fetch her. Won't you, lass? Come, now!"

"'Tis no use, David," said my mother. "She couldn't do anything—for me."

"Ay, but," my father persisted, "you're forgettin' that she've worked cures afore this. I'm fair believin'," he added with conviction, "that they's virtue in some o' they charms. Not in many, maybe, but in some. An' she might work a cure on you. I'm not sayin' she will. I'm only sayin' she might."

My mother stared long at the white washed rafters overhead. "Oh," she sighed, plucking at the coverlet, "if only she could!"

"She might," said my father. "They's no tellin' till you've tried."

"'Tis true, David," my mother whispered, still fingering the coverlet. "God works in strange ways—and we've no one else in this land to help us—and, perhaps, He might——"

My father was quick to press his advantage. "Ay," he cried, "'tis very *likely* she'll cure you."

"David," said my mother, tearing at the coverlet, "let us have her over to see me. She might do me good," she ran on, eagerly. "She might at least tell me what I'm ailing of. She might stop the pain. She might even ——"

"Hush!" my father interrupted, softly. "Don't build on it, dear," said he, who had himself, but a moment gone, been so eager and confident. "But we'll try what she can do."

"Ay, dear," my mother whispered, in a voice grown very weak, "we'll try."

Skipper Tommy Lovejoy would have my father leave *him* fetch the woman from Wolf Cove, nor, to my father's impatient surprise, would hear of any other; and he tipped me a happy wink—which had also a glint of mystery in it—when my father said that he might: whereby I knew that the old fellow was about the business of the book. And three days later, being on the lookout at the window of my mother's room, I beheld the punt come back by way of North Tickle, Skipper Tommy labouring heavily at the oars, and the woman, squatted in the stern, serenely managing the sail to make the best of a capful of wind. I marvelled that the punt should

make headway so poor in the quiet water—and that she should be so much by the stern—and that Skipper Tommy should be bent near double—until, by and by, the doctor-woman came waddling up the path, the skipper at her heels: whereupon I marvelled no more, for the reason was quite plain.

"Ecod! lad," the skipper whispered, taking me aside, the while wiping the sweat from his red face with his hand; "but she'll weigh five quintal if a pound! She's e-*nar*-mous! 'Twould break your heart t' pull *that* cargo from Wolf Cove. But I managed it, lad," with a solemn wink, "for the good o' the cause. Hist! now; but I found out a wonderful lot —about cures!"

Indeed, she was of a bulk most extraordinary; and she was rolling in fat, above and below, though it was springtime! 'Twas a wonder to me, with our folk not yet fattened by the more generous diet of the season, that she had managed to preserve her great double chin through the winter. It may be that this unfathomable circumstance first put me in awe of her; but I am inclined to think, after all, that it was her eyes, which were not like the eyes of our folk, but were brown—dog's eyes, we call them on our coast, for we are a blue-eyed race—and upon occasion flashed like lightning. So much weight did she carry forward, too, that I fancied (and still

believe) she would have toppled over had she not long ago learned to outwit nature in the matter of maintaining a balance. And an odd figure she cut, as you may be sure! For she was dressed somewhat in the fashion of men, with a cloth cap, rusty pea-jacket and sea-boots (the last, for some mysterious reason, being slit up the sides, as a brief skirt disclosed); and her grizzled hair was cut short, in the manner of men, but yet with some of the coquetry of women. In truth, as we soon found, it was her boast that she was the equal of men, her complaint that the foolish way of the world (which she said had gone all askew) would not let her skipper a schooner, which, as she maintained in a deep bass voice, she was more capable of doing than most men.

"I make no doubt o' that, mum," said Skipper Tommy Lovejoy, to whom, in the kitchen, that night, she propounded her strange philosophy; "but you see, mum, *'tis* the way o' the world, an' folks just *will* stick t' their idees, an', mum," he went on, with a propitiating smile, "as you is only a woman, why——"

"*Only* a woman!" she roared, sitting up with a jerk. "Does you say——"

"Why, ay, mum!" Skipper Tommy put in, mildly. "You *isn't* a man, is you?"

She sat dumb and transfixed.

"Well, then," said Skipper Tommy, in a mildly argumentative way, "'tis as I says. You must do as the women does, an' not as a man might want to ——"

"Mm-a-an!" she mocked, in a way that withered the poor skipper. "No, I isn't a man! Was you hearin' me *say* I was? Oh, you *wasn't*, wasn't you? An' is you thinkin' I'd *be* a man an I could? What!" she roared. "You isn't *sure* about that, isn't you? Oh, my! Isn't you! Well, well! He isn't *sure*," appealing to me, with a shaking under lip. "Oh, my! There's a man—*he's* a man for you—there's a *man*—puttin' a poor woman t' scorn! Oh, my!" she wailed, bursting into tears, as all women will, when put to the need of it. "Oh, dear!"

Skipper Tommy was vastly concerned for her. "My poor woman," he began, "don't you be cryin', now. Come, now ——"

"Oh, his *poor* woman," she interrupted, bitingly. "*His* poor woman! Oh, my! An' I s'pose you thinks 'tis the poor woman's place t' work in the splittin' stage an' not on the deck of a fore-an'-after. You does, does you? Ay, 'tis what I *s'posed!*" she said, with scorn. "An' if *you* married *me*," she continued, transfixing the terrified skipper with a fat forefinger, "I s'pose you'd be wantin' me t' split the fish

you cotched. Oh, you would, would you? Oh, my! But I'll have you t' know, Skipper Thomas Lovejoy," with a sudden and alarming change of voice, "that I've the makin's of a better ship's-master than *you*. An' by the Lord Harry! I'm a better *man*," saying which, she leaped from her chair with surprising agility, and began to roll up her sleeves, "an' I'll prove it on your wisage! Come on with you!" she cried, striking a belligerent attitude, her fists waving in a fashion most terrifying. "Come on an you dare!"

Skipper Tommy dodged behind the table in great haste and horror.

"Oh, dear!" cried she. "He won't! Oh, my! *There's* a man for you. An' I'm but a woman, is I. His poor woman. Oh, *his* woman! Look you here, Skipper Thomas Lovejoy, you been stickin' wonderful close alongside o' me since you come t' Wolf Cove, an' I'm not quite knowin' what tricks you've in mind. But I'm thinkin' you're like all the men, an' I'll have you t' know this, that if 'tis marriage with me you're thinkin' on ——"

But Skipper Tommy gasped and wildly fled.

"Ha!" she snorted, triumphantly. "I was *thinkin'* I was a better man than he!"

"'Tis a shame," said I, "t' scare un so!"

Whereat, without uttering a sound, she laughed

until the china clinked and rattled on the shelves, and I thought the pots and pans would come clattering from their places. And then she strutted the floor for all the world like a rooster once I saw in the South.

VIII

THE BLIND and The BLIND

AH, well! at once she set about the cure of my mother. And she went tripping about the house—and tripping she went, believe me, stout as she was, as lightsome as one of Skipper Tommy's fairies—with a manner so large and confident, a glance so compelling, that 'twas beyond us to doubt her power or slight her commands. First of all she told my mother, repeating it with patience and persuasive insistence, that she would be well in six days, and must believe the words true, else she would never be well, at all. And when my mother had brightened with this new hope, the woman, muttering words without meaning, hung a curious brown object about her neck, which she said had come from a holy place and possessed a strange and powerful virtue for healing. My mother fondled it, with glistening eyes and very tenderly, and, when the doctor-woman had gone out, whispered to me that it was a horse-chestnut, and put her in mind of the days when she dwelt in Boston, a little maid.

"But 'tis not healin' you," I protested, touching a

tear which had settled in the deep hollow of her cheek. "'Tis makin' you sad."

"Oh, no!" said she. "'Tis making me very happy."

"But you is cryin'," said I. "An' I'm thinkin' 'tis because you wisht you was in Boston."

"No, no!" she cried, her lip trembling. "I'm not wishing that. I've *never* wished *that!* I'm glad your father found me and took me where he wished. Oh, I'm glad of that—glad he found and loved me—glad I gave myself to his dear care! Why, were I in Boston, to-day, I would not have my dear, big David, your father, lad, and I would not have your sister, and I would not have ——"

"Me?" I put in, archly.

"Ay," she said, with infinite tenderness, "*you*, Davy, dear!"

For many days, thereafter, the doctor-woman possessed our house, and I've no doubt she was happy in her new estate—at table, at any rate, for there she was garrulent and active, and astoundingly active, with less of garrulence, on feast days, when my father had pork provided. And she had a way with the maids in the kitchen that kept the young men from the door (which my sister never could manage); and I have since been led to think 'twas because she sought to work her will on Skipper Tommy Love-

joy, undisturbed by the clatter and quick eyes of young folk. For Skipper Tommy, to my increasing alarm and to the panic of the twins, who wished for no second mother, still frequented the kitchen, when the day's work was done, and was all the while in a mood so downcast, of a manner so furtive, that it made me sad to talk with him. But by day our kitchen was intolerable with smells—intolerable to him and to us all (save to my sister, who is, and ever has been, brave)—while the doctor-woman hung over the stove, working with things the sight of which my stomach would not brook, but which my mother took in ignorance, hoping they would cure her. God knows what medicines were mixed! I would not name the things I saw. And the doctor-woman would not even have us ask what use she made of them: nor have I since sought to know; 'tis best, I think, forgotten.

But my mother got no better.

"Skipper David," said the doctor-woman, at last, "I'm wantin' four lump-fish."

"Four lump-fish!" my father wondered. "Is you?"

"Oh, my!" she answered, tartly. "Is I? Yes, I is. An' I'll thank you t' get un an' ask no questions. For *I'm* mindin' *my* business, an' I'll thank *you* t' mind *yours*. An' if *you* thinks *you* can do the doctorin' ——"

"I'm not seekin' t' hinder you," said my father, flushing. "You go on with your work. I'll pay; but——"

"Oh, will you?" she cried, shrilly. "He'll pay, says he. Oh, my! He'll *pay!* Oh, dear!"

"Come, now, woman!" said my father, indignantly. "I've had you come, an' I'll stand by what you does. I'll get the lump-fish; but 'tis the last cure you'll try. If it fails, back you go t' Wolf Cove."

"Oh, my!" said she, taken aback. "Back I goes, does I! An' t' Wolf Cove? Oh, dear!"

My father sent word to the masters of the cod-traps, which were then set off the heads, that such sculpin as got in the nets by chance must be saved for him. He was overwrought, as I have said, by sorrow, overcome, it may be, by the way this woman had. And soon he had for her four green, prickly-skinned, jelly-like, big-bellied lump-fish, which were not appetizing to look upon, though I've heard tell that starving folk, being driven to it, have eaten them. My sister would not be driven from the kitchen, though the woman was vehement in anger, but held to it that she must know the character of the dose my mother was to take. So they worked together—the doctor-woman scowling darkly—until the medicine was ready: which was in the late evening of that day. Then they went to my mother's room to administer the first of it.

"'Tis a new medicine," my mother said, with a smile, when she held the glass in her hand.

"Ay," crooned the doctor-woman, "drink it, now, my dear."

My mother raised the glass to her lips. "And what is it?" she asked, withdrawing the glass with a shudder.

"Tut, tut!" the doctor-woman exclaimed. "'Tis but a soup. 'Twill do you good."

"I'm sure it will," my mother gently said. "But I wonder what it is."

Again she raised the glass with a wry face. But my sister stayed her hand.

"I'll not have you take it," said she, firmly, "without knowin' what it is."

The doctor-woman struck her arm away. "Leave the woman drink it!" she screamed, now in a gust of passion.

"What's—this you're—giving me?" my mother stammered, looking upon the glass in alarm and new disgust.

"'Tis the eyes o' four lump-fish," said my sister.

My mother dropped the glass, so that the contents were spilled over the coverlet, and fell back on the pillows, where she lay white and still.

"Out with you!" said my sister to the doctor-woman. "I'll have no more o' your cures!"

"Oh, my!" shrilled the woman, dropping into her most biting manner. *She* won't have no more o' my cures! Oh, dear, she ——"

"Out with you!" cried my sister, as she smartly clapped her hands under the woman's nose. "Out o' the house with you!"

"Oh, 'tis *out* with me, is it? Out o' the *house* with me! Oh, dear! Out o' the house with *me!* I'll have you t' know ——"

My sister ignored the ponderous fist raised against her. She stamped her small foot, her eyes flashing, the blood flushing her cheeks and brow.

"Out you go!" she cried. "*I'm* not afeared o' you!"

I stood aghast while the doctor-woman backed through the door. Never before had I known my gentle sister to flash and flush with angry passion. Nor have I since.

Next morning, my father paid the woman from Wolf Cove a barrel of flour, with which she was ill content, and traded her two barrels more for the horse-chestnut, which my mother wished to keep lying on her breast, because it comforted her. To Skipper Tommy Lovejoy fell the lot of taking the woman back in the punt; for, as my father said, 'twas he that brought her safely, and, surely, the one

who could manage that could be trusted to get her back without accident.

"An' 'tis parlous work, lad," said the skipper, with an anxious shrug, while we waited on the wharf for the woman to come. "I'm very much afeared. Ay," he added, frowning, "I is that!"

"I'm not knowin' why," said I, "for the wind's blowin' fair from the sou'west, an' you'll have a fine time t' Wolf Cove."

"'Tis not that," said he, quietly. "Hist!" jerking his head towards our house, where the woman yet was. "'Tis *she!*"

"I'd not be afeared o' *she*," said I. "'Twas but last night," I added, proudly, "my sister gave her her tea in a mug."

"Oh, ay," said he, "I heared tell o' that. But 'tis not t' the point. Davy, lad," in an undertone which betrayed great agitation, "she've her cap set for a man, an' she's desperate."

"Ay?" said I.

He bent close to my ear. "An' she've her eye on *me!*" he whispered.

"Skipper Tommy," I earnestly pleaded, "don't you go an' do it."

"Well, lad," he answered, pulling at his nose, "the good Lard made me what I is. I'm not complainin'

o' the taste He showed. No, no! I would not think o' doin' that. But——"

"He made you kind," I broke in, hotly, "an' such as good folk love."

"I'm not knowin' much about that, Davy. The good Lard made me as He willed. But I'm an obligin' man. I've turned out, Davy, most wonderful obligin'. I'm always doin' what folks wants me to. Such men as me, lad," he went on, precisely indicating the weakness of his tender character, "is made that way. An' if she tells me she's a lone woman, and if she begins t' cry, what is I to do? An' if I has t' pass me word, Davy, t' stop her tears! Eh, lad? Will you tell me, David Roth, *what* is I t' do?"

"Turn the punt over," said I, quickly. "They's wind enough for that, man! An' 'tis your only chance, Skipper Tommy—'tis the only chance *you* got—if she begins t' cry."

He was dispirited. "I wisht," he said, sadly, "that the Lard hadn't made me *quite* so obligin'!"

"'Tis too bad!"

"Ay," he sighed, "'tis too bad I can't trust meself in the company o' folk that's givin' t' weepin'."

"I'll have the twins pray for you," I ventured.

"Do!" he cried, brightening. "'Tis a grand thought! An' do you tell them two dear lads that

I'll never give in—no, lad, their father'll never give in t' that woman—till he's just *got* to."

"But, Skipper Tommy," said I, now much alarmed, so hopeless was his tone, stout as his words were, "tell my father you're not wantin' t' go. Sure, he can send Elisha Turr in your stead."

"Ay," said he, "but I *is* wantin' t' go. That's it. I'm thinkin' all the time o' the book, lad. I'm wantin' t' make that book a good book. I'm wantin' t' learn more about cures."

"I'm thinkin' *her* cures isn't worth much," said I.

He patted me on the head. "You is but a lad," said he, indulgent with my youth, "an' your judgment isn't well growed yet. Some o' they cures is bad, no doubt," he added, "an' some is good. I wants no bad cures in my book. I'll not *have* them there. But does you think I can't *try* un all on *meself* afore I has un *put* in the book?"

When the punt was well through North Tickle, on a free, freshening wind, I sped to the Rat Hole to apprise the twins of their father's unhappy situation, and to beg of them to be constant and importunate in prayer that he might be saved from the perils of that voyage. Then, still running as fast as my legs would go, I returned to our house, where,

again, I found the shadow and the mystery, and the hush in all the rooms.

"Davy!"

"Ay, Bessie," I answered. "'Tis I."

"Our mother's wantin' you, dear."

I tiptoed up the stair, and to the bed where my mother lay, and, very softly, I laid my cheek against her lips.

"My sister sent me, mum," I whispered.

"Yes," she sighed. "I'm—just wanting you."

Her arm, languid and light, stole round my waist.

IX

A WRECK on The THIRTY DEVILS

FOG—thick, stifling, clammy! A vast bank of it lay stranded on the rocks of our coast: muffling voices, making men gasp. In a murky cloud it pressed against my mother's windows. Wharves, cottages, harbour water, great hills beyond—the whole world—had vanished. There was nothing left but a patch of smoking rock beneath. It had come—a grey cloud, drifting low and languidly—with a lazy draught of wind from the east, which had dragged it upon the coast, spread it broadcast and expired of the effort to carry it into the wilderness.

"Wonderful thick, b'y!" was the salutation for the day.

"'S mud," was the response.

Down went the barometer—down, down, slowly, uncompromisingly down! 'Twas shocking to the nerves to consult it.

"An' I'm tellin' you this, lads," said a man on my father's wharf, tugging uneasily at his sou'wester, "that afore midnight you'll be needin' t' glue your hair on!"

This feeling of apprehension was everywhere—on the roads, in the stages, in the very air. No man of our harbour put to sea. With the big wind coming, 'twas no place for punt, schooner or steamer. The waters off shore were set with traps for the unwary and the unknowing—the bluffs veiled by mist, the drift ice hidden, the reefs covered up. In a gale of wind from the east there would be no escape.

Through the dragging day my mother had been restless and in pain. In the evening she turned to us.

"I'm tired," she whispered.

Tired? Oh, ay! She was tired—very, very tired! It was near time for her to rest. She was sadly needing that.

"An' will you try t' sleep, now?" my sister asked.

"Ay," she answered, wanly, "I'll sleep a bit, now, if I can. Where's Davy?"

"Sure, mama," said I, in surprise, "I'm sittin' right by the bed!"

"Ah, Davy!" she whispered, happily, stretching out a hand to touch me. "My little son!"

"An' I been sittin' here all the time!" said I.

"All the time?" she said. "But I've been so sick, dear, I haven't noticed much. And 'tis so dark."

"No, mum; 'tis not so very. 'Tis thick, but 'tis not so very dark. 'Tis not lamp-lightin' time yet."

"How strange!" she muttered. "It seems so very dark. Ah, well! Do you go out for a run in the air, dear, while your mother sleeps. I'm thinking I'll be better—when I've had a little sleep."

My sister busied herself with the pillows and coverlet; and she made all soft and neat, that my mother might rest the better for it.

"You're so tender with me, dear," said my mother "Every day I bless God for my dear daughter."

My sister kissed my mother. "Hush!" she said. "Do you go t' sleep, now, little mother. 'Twill do you good."

"Yes," my mother sighed, "for I'm—so very—tired."

When she had fallen asleep, I slung my lantern over my arm and scampered off to the Rat Hole to yarn with the twins, making what speed I could in the fog and untimely dusk, and happy, for the moment, to be free of the brooding shadow in our house. The day was not yet fled; but the light abroad—a sullen greyness, splashed with angry red in the west, where the mist was thinning—was fading fast and fearfully. And there was an ominous stirring of wind in the east: at intervals, storm puffs came swirling over the hills from the sea; and they ran off inland like mad, leaving the air of a sudden once

more stagnant. Fresh and cool they were—grateful enough, indeed, blowing through the thick, dead dusk—but sure warning, too, of great gusts to come. We were to have weather—a gale from the northeast, by all the lore of the coast—and it would be a wild night, with the breakers of Raven Rock and the Thirty Black Devils leaping high and merrily in the morning. As I ran down the last hill, with an eye on the light glowing in the kitchen window of Skipper Tommy Lovejoy's cottage, I made shift to hope that the old man had made harbour from Wolf Cove, but thought it most unlikely.

He had.

"You got home, Skipper Tommy," I cried, shouldering the door shut against a gust of wind, "an' I'm glad o' that! 'Tis goin' t' blow most awful, I'm thinkin'."

My welcome was of the gloomiest description. I observed that the twins, who lay feet to feet on the corner-seat, did not spring to meet me, but were cast down; and that Skipper Tommy, himself, sitting over the fire with a cup of tea on the table at his elbow, was glum as a deacon.

"Oh," said he, looking up with the ghost of a laugh, "I got in. You wasn't frettin' about *me*, was you, Davy? Oh, don't you ever go frettin' about me, lad, when—ah, well!—when they's nothin' but

fog t' fear. Sure, 'twasn't no trouble for *me* t' find North Tickle in the fog. Ah, me! If 'twas only that! Sure, I bumped her nose agin the point o' God's Warning, an' rattled her bones a bit, but, lad, me an' the punt is used t' little things like that. Oh, ay," he repeated, dismally, "I got *in*."

Evidently the worst had happened. "Did you?" said I, blankly. "An' was you—was you—*cotched?*"

"Is you thinkin' o' *she*, Davy?" he answered. "Well," in a melancholy drawl, smoothing his stubble of grey beard, his forehead deeply furrowed, "I'm not admittin' I is. But, Davy," he added, "she cast a hook, an'—well, I—I nibbled. Yes, I did, lad! I went an' nibbled!"

One of the twins started up in alarm. "Hark!" he whispered.

We listened—but heard nothing. A gust of wind rattled the window, and, crying hoarsely, swept under the house. There was nothing more than that.

"Hist!" said the twin.

We heard only the ominous mutter and sigh of the gust departing.

"Jacky," said the skipper, anxiously, "what was you thinkin' you heared, b'y?"

Jacky fidgetted in his seat. "'Twas like the mail-boat's whistle, zur," he answered, "but 'twas sort o' hoarser."

"Why, lad," said the skipper, "the mail-boat's not handy by two hundred miles! 'Twas but the wind."

But he scratched his head in a puzzled way.

"Ay, maybe, zur," Jacky replied, still alert for a sound from the sea, "but 'twas not *like* the wind."

Skipper Tommy held up his hand. "Ay," said he, when we had listened a long time, "'twas but the wind."

"Ay," said we all, "'twas but the wind."

"Ah, well, Davy," the skipper resumed, "she cast a hook, as I was sayin', an' I nibbled."

The twins groaned in concert.

"But the good Lard, Davy," the skipper went on, "had sent a switch o' wind from the sou'west. So they was a bit o' lop on the sea, an' 'twas t' that I turned, when the case got desperate. An' desperate it soon got, lad. Ah, indeed! 'long about Herring Head it got fair desperate. 'Skipper Thomas,' says she, 'we're gettin' old, you an' me,' says she. 'Sure, mum,' says I, 'not *you*, mum! I'll never give in t' that,' says I."

Our faces fell.

"'Twas what I done," the skipper persisted, with an air of guilt and remorse. "I just *felt* like doin' it, an' so I done it. 'I'll never give in to it, mum,' says I, 'that *you're* gettin' old.'"

I groaned with the twins—and Skipper Tommy made a dismal quartette of it—and the wind, rising sharply at that moment, contributed a chorus of heartrending noises.

"Ay," the skipper continued, "'twas a sad mistake. 'Twas floutin' Providence t' say a word like that to a woman like she. But I just felt like it. Then, 'Oh, dear,' says she, 'tis barb'rous lonely t' Wolf Cove,' says she. 'Tis too bad, mum,' says I. An' I throwed the bow o' the punt plump into a wave, Davy, lad, an' shipped a bucket o' water. 'An',' says she, 'it must be lonely for you, Skipper Thomas,' says she, 'livin' there at the Rat Hole.'"

Skipper Tommy paused to sigh and tweak his nose; and he tweaked so often and sighed so long that I lost patience.

"An' what did you do then?" I demanded.

"Took in more water, Davy," he groaned, "for they wasn't nothin' else I could think of. 'An',' says she, 'is it not lonely, Skipper Thomas,' says she, 'at the Rat Hole?' 'No, mum,' says I, takin' aboard another bucket or two, 'for I've the twins,' says I. With that she put her kerchief to her eyes, Davy, an' begun t' sniffle. An' t' relieve me feelin's, lad, for I was drove desperate, I just *had* t' let the top of a wave fall over the bow: which I done, Davy,

an' may the Lard forgive me! An' I'm not denyin' that 'twas a sizable wave she took."

He stared despondently at the floor.

"She gathered up her skirts," he went on. "An', 'Ah, Skipper Thomas,' says she, 'twins,' says she, 'is nothin'. Sure,' says she, 'twins is no good on a cold winter's night.' I'm not denyin', Davy," said the skipper, solemnly, looking me straight in the eye, "that she scared me with that. I'm not denyin' that me hand slipped. I'm not denyin' that I put the tiller over a *wee bit* too far—maybe a foot—maybe a foot an' a half, in the excitement o' the moment—I isn't quite sure. No, no! I'm far, lad, from denyin' that I near swamped the boat. 'Tis gettin' rough,' says she. 'Ay,' says I, 'an' we'll be gettin' along a deal better, mum,' says I, 'if you bail.' So I kep' her bailin', Davy," the skipper concluded, with a long sigh and a sad wag of the head, "from Herring Head t' Wolf Cove. An', well, lad, she didn't quite cotch me, for she hadn't no time t' waste, but, as I was sayin', she cast a hook."

"You're well rid o' she," said I.

Timmie rose to look out of the window. "Hear the wind!" said he, turning in awe, while the cottage trembled under the rush of a gust. "My! but 'twill blow, the night!"

"Ah, Timmie," sighed the skipper, "what's a gale o' wind t' the snares o' women!"

"Women!" cried I. "Sure, she'll trouble you no more. You're well rid o' she."

"But I *isn't* rid o' she, Davy," he groaned, "an' that's what's troublin' the twins an' me. I isn't rid o' she, for I've heared tell she've some l'arnin' an' can write a letter."

"Write!" cried I. "She won't write."

"Ah, Davy," sighed the skipper, his head falling over his breast, "you've no knowledge o' women. They never gives in, lad, that they're beat. They never *knows* they're beat. An' that one, lad, wouldn't know it if she was told!"

"Leave her write so much as she wants," said I. "'Twill do you no harm."

"No harm?" said he, looking up. "No harm in writin'?"

"No," said I. "Sure, you can't read!"

The twins leaped from the corner-seat and emitted a shrill and joyful whoop. Skipper Tommy threw back his head, opened his great mouth in silent laughter, and slapped his thigh with such violence that the noise was like a pistol shot.

"No more I can," he roared, "an' I'm too old t' l'arn!"

Laughter—a fit of it—seized him. It exploded

like a thunder-clap, and continued, uproariously, interrupted by gasps, when he lost his breath, and by groans, when a stitch made him wince. There was no resisting it. The twins doubled up in the corner-seat, miserably screaming, their heels waving in the air; and Davy Roth collapsed on the floor, gripping his sides, his eyes staring, his mouth wide open, venting his mirth, the while, in painful shrieks. Skipper Tommy was himself again—freed o' the nets o' women—restored to us and to his own good humour—once again boon comrade of the twins and me! He jumped from his chair; and with a "Tra-la-la!" and a merry "Hi-tum-ti-iddle-dee-um!" he fell into a fantastic dance, thumping the boards with his stockinged feet, advancing and retreating with a flourish, bowing and balancing to an imaginary partner, all in a fashion so excruciatingly exaggerated that the twins screamed, "Don't, father!" and Davy Roth moaned, "Oh, stop, zur, please, zur!" while the crimson, perspiring, light-footed, ridiculously bow-legged old fellow still went cavorting over the kitchen floor.

But I was a child—only a child—living in the shadow of some great sorrow, which, though I did not know it, had pressed close upon us. There flashed before me a vision of my mother lying wan

and white on the pillows. And I turned on my face and began to cry.

"Davy, lad!" said the skipper, tenderly, seeking to lift my head. "Hush, lad! Don't cry!"

But I sobbed the harder.

"Ah, Davy," the twins pleaded, "stop cryin'! Do, now!"

Skipper Tommy took me on his knee; and I hid my face on his breast, and lay sobbing hopelessly, while he sought to sooth me with many a pat and "Hush!" and "Never mind!"

"I'm wantin' t' go home," I moaned.

He gathered me closer in his arms. "Do you stay your grief, Davy," he whispered, "afore you goes."

"I'm wantin' t' go home," I sobbed, "t' my mother!"

Timmie and Jacky came near, and the one patted my hand, and the other put an arm around me.

"Sure, the twins 'll take you home, Davy," said the skipper, softly, "when you stops cryin'. Hush, lad! Hush, now!"

They were tender with me, and I was comforted; my sobs soon ceased, but still I kept my head against the skipper's breast. And while there I lay, there came from the sea—from the southwest in a lull of the wind—breaking into the tender silence—the blast of a steam whistle, deep, full-throated, prolonged.

"Hist!" whispered Jacky. "Does you not hear?"

Skipper Tommy stood me on my feet, and himself slowly rose, listening intently.

"Lads," he asked, his voice shaking, "was it the mail-boat?"

"No, zur!" the twins gasped.

"Is you sure?"

"'Tis not the way she blows, zur!"

"'Tis surely not she," the skipper mused. "In the sou'west she'd be out of her course. Hark!"

Once more the long, hoarse roar broke the silence, but now rising again and again, agonized, like a cry for help.

"Dear Lard!" skipper Tommy cried, putting his hands to his face. "'Tis a big steamer on the Thirty Black Devils!"

"A wreck!" shouted Jacky, leaping for his jacket. "A wreck! A wreck!"

Distraction seized the skipper. "'Tis a wreck!" he roared. "My boots, lads! Wreck! Wreck!"

We lads went mad. No steamer had been wrecked on the coast in our time. There were deeds to do! There was salvage to win!

"Wreck!" we screamed. "Wreck! Wreck! Wreck!"

Then out we four ran. It was after dark. The vault was black. But the wind had turned the fog to

thin mist. The surrounding hills stood disclosed—solid shadows in the night. Half a gale was blowing from the sea: it broke over the hills; it swooped from the inky sky; it swept past in long, clinging gusts. We breasted it heads down. The twins raised the alarm. Wreck! Wreck! Folk joined us as we ran. They were in anxious haste to save life. They were gleeful with the hope of salvage. What the sea casts up the Lord provides! Wreck! Wreck! Far-off cries answered us. The cottage windows were aglow. Lanterns danced over the flakes. Lights moved over the harbour water. Wreck! Wreck! On we stumbled. Our feet struck the road with thud and scrape. Our lanterns clattered and buzzed and fluttered. Wreck! Wreck! We plunged down the last hill and came gasping to my father's wharf.

Most of our folk were already vigorously underway towards South Tickle.

"Lives afore salvage, lads!" my father shouted from his punt.

My sister caught my arm.

"'Tis a big steamer, Bessie!" I cried, turning.

"Ay," she said, hurriedly. "But do you go stay with mother, Davy. She've sent me t' Tom Turr's by the path. They're t' fetch the wrecked folk there. Make haste, lad! She've been left alone."

I ran up the path to our house.

X

THE FLIGHT

IT was late in the night. My mother and I sat alone in her dim-lit room. We were waiting—both waiting. And I was waiting for the lights of the returning punts.

"Davy!" my mother called. "You are still there?"

"Ay, mother," I answered. "I'm still sittin' by the window, lookin' out."

"I am glad, dear," she sighed, "that you are here—with me—to-night."

She craved love, my love; and my heart responded, as the knowing hearts of children will.

"Ah, mother," I said, "'tis lovely t' be sittin' here—all alone with you!"

"Don't, Davy!" she cried, catching her breath. "I'm not able to bear the joy of it. My heart——"

"'Tis so," I persisted, "'cause I loves you so!"

"But, oh, I'm glad, Davy!" she whispered. "I'm glad you love your mother. And I'm glad," she added, softly, "that you've told me so—to-night."

By and by I grew drowsy. My eyes would not

stay open. And I fell asleep with my head on the window-sill. I do not know how long I slept.

"Davy!" my mother called.

"Ay?" I answered, waking. "Sure, I been asleep!"

"But you're not wanting to go to bed?" she asked, anxiously. "You'll not leave your mother all alone, will you?"

"No, no, mama!"

"No," she said. "Do not leave your mother, now."

Again I fell asleep. It may be that I wasted a long, long time in sleep.

"Davy!" she called.

I answered. And, "I cannot stay awake," I said. "Sure, 'tis quite past me t' do it, for I'm so wonderful sleepy."

"Come closer," she said. "Tired lad!" she went on, when she had my hand in hers. "Sleepy head! Lie down beside me, dear, and go to sleep. I'm not afraid—not afraid, at all—to be left alone. Oh, you're so tired, little lad! Lie down and sleep. For your mother is very brave—to-night. And tell your father, Davy—when he comes and wakes you—and tell your sister, too—that your mother was happy, oh, very happy and brave, when . . ."

"When you fell asleep?" I asked.

"Yes," she answered, in a voice so low I could but hear it. "That I was happy when—I fell asleep."

I pulled off my jacket.

"I'm wanting to hear you say your prayers, Davy," she said, "before you go to sleep. I'm wanting once again—just once again—to hear you say your prayers."

I knelt beside the bed.

"My little son!" my mother said. "My—little—son!"

"My mother!" I responded, looking up.

She lifted my right hand. "Dear Jesus, lover of children," she prayed, "take, oh, take this little hand!"

And I began to say my prayers, while my mother's fingers wandered tenderly through my curls, but I was a tired child, and fell asleep as I prayed. And when I awoke, my mother's hand lay still and strangely heavy on my head.

Then the child that was I knew that his mother was dead. He leaped from his knees with a broken cry, and stood expectant, but yet in awe, searching the dim, breathless room for a beatified figure, white-robed, winged, radiant, like the angel of the picture by his bed, for he believed that souls thus took their flight; but he saw only shadows.

"Mama," he whispered, "where is you?"

There was no answer to the child's question. The risen wind blew wildly in the black night without. But it was still dim and breathless in the room.

"Mama," said the child, "is your soul hidin' from me?"

Still the child was left unanswered. He waited, listening—but was not answered.

"Don't hide," he pleaded. "Oh, don't hide, for I'm not wantin' to play! Oh, mother, I'm wantin' you sore!"

And, now, he knew that she would come, for, "I'm wantin' you, mother!" he had been used to crying in the night, and she had never failed to answer, but had come swiftly and with comfort. He waited for a voice and for a vision, surely expecting them in answer to his cry; but he saw only shadows, heard only the scream of the wind, and a sudden, angry patter of rain on the roof. Then the child that was I fancied that his mother's soul had fled while yet he slept, and, being persuaded that its course was heavenward, ran out, seeking it. And he forgets what then he did, save that he climbed the broken cliff behind the house, crying, "Wait, oh, wait!" and that he came, at last, to the summit of the Watchman, where there was a tumult of wind and rain.

"Mama!" he screamed, lifting his hands in appeal

to the wide, black sky. "You forgot t' kiss me good-bye! Oh, come back!"

He flung himself prone on the naked rock, for the soul of his mother did not come, though patiently he had watched for the glory of its returning flight.

"She've forgot me!" he moaned. "Oh, she've forgot me!"

When, trembling and bedraggled, I came again to the room where my mother's body lay, my sister was kneeling by the bed, and my father was in converse with a stranger, who was not like the men of our coast. "Not necessarily mortal," this man was saying. "An operation—just a simple operation—easily performed with what you have at hand—would have saved the woman."

"Saved her, Doctor?" said my father passionately. "Is you sayin' *that?*"

"I have said so. It would have saved her. Had we been wrecked five days ago she would have been alive."

A torrent of rain beat on the house.

"Alive?" my father muttered, staring at the floor. "She would have been alive!"

The stranger looked upon my father in pity. "I'm sorry for you, my man," he said.

"'Tis strange," my father muttered, still staring at the floor. "'Tis strange—how things—comes about. Five days—just five . . ."

He muttered on.

"Yes," the stranger broke in, stirring nervously. "Had I come but five days ago."

A sudden rising of the gale—the breaking of its fury—filled the room with a dreadful confusion.

"Indeed—I'm—sorry—very sorry," the stranger stammered; his lips were drawn; in his eyes was the flare of some tragedy of feeling.

My father did not move—but continued vacantly to stare at the floor.

"Really—you know—I am!"

"Is you?" then my father asked, looking up. "Is you sorry for me an' Davy an' the lass?" The stranger dared not meet my father's eyes. "An' you could have saved her," my father went on. "*You* could have saved her! She didn't have t' go. She died—for want o' you! God Almighty," he cried, raising his clenched hand, "this man come too late God Almighty—does you hear me, God Almighty?—the man you sent come too late! An' you," he flashed, turning on the stranger, "could have saved her? Oh, my dear lass! An' she would have been here the night? Here like she used t' be? Here in her dear body? Here?" he cried, striking

his breast. "She would have lain here the night had you come afore? Oh, why didn't you come?" he moaned. "You hold life an' death in your hands, zur, t' give or withhold. Why didn't you come—t' give the gift o' life t' she?"

The stranger shrank away. "Stop!" he cried, in agony. "How was I to know?"

"Hush, father!" my sister pleaded.

In a flash of passion my father advanced upon the man. "How was you t' know?" he burst out. "Where you been? What you been doin'? Does you hear me?" he demanded, his voice rising with the noise of wind and rain. "What you been doin'?"

"Stop it, man! You touch me to the quick! You don't know—you don't know ——"

"What you been doin'? We're dyin' here for want o' such as you. What you been doin'?"

There was no answer. The stranger had covered his face with his hands.

"O God," my father cried, again appealing to Heaven, "judge this man!"

"Stop!"

It was a bitter cry—the agony sounding clear and poignant above the manifold voices of the storm—but it won no heed.

"O God, judge this man!"

"Will no one stop him?" the stranger moaned. "For God's sake—stop him—some one!"

"O God, judge this man!"

The stranger fled. . . .

"Oh, my dear wife!" my father sobbed, at last, sinking into the great armchair, wherein the mail-boat doctor had not sat. "Oh, my dear wife!"

"Father!" my dear sister whispered, flinging her soft arms about his neck and pressing her cheek against his brow. "Dear father!"

And while the great gale raged, she sought to comfort my father and me, but could not.

XI

The WOMEN at The GATE

BY and by my sister put me in dry clothes, and bidding me be a good lad, sat me in the best room below, where the maids had laid a fire. And Skipper Tommy Lovejoy, finding me there disconsolate, took me to the seaward hills to watch the break of day: for the rain had ceased, the wind fallen away; and the gray light of dawn was in the eastern sky.

"I'm wantin' t' tell you, Davy," he said, in a confidential way, as we trudged along, "about the gate o' heaven."

I took his hand.

"An' I *been* wantin' t' tell you," he added, giving his nose a little tweak, "for a long, long time."

"Is you?"

"Ay, lad; an' about the women at the gate."

"Women, Skipper Tommy?" said I, puzzled. "An', pray, who is they?"

"Mothers," he answered. "Just mothers."

"What they doin' at the gate? No, no! They're not *there*. Sure, they're playin' harps at the foot o' the throne."

"No," said he, positively; "they're at the gate."

"What they doin' there?"

"Waitin'."

We were now come to the crest of a hill; and the sea was spread before us—breaking angrily under the low, black sky.

"What's they waitin' for?" I asked.

"Davy, lad," he answered, impressively, "they're waitin' for them they bore. *That's* what they're waitin' for."

"For their sons?"

"Ay; an' for their daughters, too."

While I watched the big seas break on the rocks below—and the clouds drift up from the edge of the world—I pondered upon this strange teaching. My mother had never told me of the women waiting at the gate.

"Ah, but," I said, at last, "I'm thinkin' God would never allow it t' go on. He'd want un all t' sing His praises. Sure, they'd just be wastin' His time—waitin' there at the gate."

Skipper Tommy shook his head—and smiled, and softly patted my shoulder.

"An' He'd gather un there, at the foot o' the throne," I went on, "an' tell un t' waste no more, but strike up their golden harps."

"No, no!"

"Why not?"

"They wouldn't go."

"But He'd *make* un go."

"He couldn't."

"Not *make* un!" I cried, amazed.

"Look you, lad," he explained, in a sage whisper, "they're all mothers, an' they'd be *wantin'* t' stay where they was, an', ecod! they'd find a way."

"Ah, well," I sighed, "'tis wearisome work—this waitin'."

"I'm thinkin' not," he answered, soberly, speaking rather to himself than to me. "'Tis not wearisome for such as know the good Lard's plan."

"'Tis wonderful hard," said I, "on the mothers o' wicked sons."

The old man smiled. "Who knows," he asked, "that 'tis wonderful hard on they?"

"But then," I mused, "the Lord would find a way t' comfort the mother o' such."

"Oh, ay!"

"I'm thinkin', maybe," I went on, "that He'd send an angel t' tell her they wasn't worth the waitin' for. 'Mind un not,' He'd say. 'They're nothin' but bad, wicked boys. Leave un go t' hell an' burn.'"

"An', now, what, lad," he inquired with deep interest, "is you thinkin' the mother would do?"

"She'd take the angel's hand," I sighed.

"Ay?"

"An' go up t' the throne—forgettin' them she'd left."

"An' then?"

"She'd praise the Lard," I sobbed.

"Never!" the skipper cried.

I looked hopefully in his face.

"Never!" he repeated. "'Lard,' she'd say, 'I loves un all the more for their sins. Leave me wait—oh, leave me wait—here at the gate. Maybe —sometime—they'll come!'"

"But some," said I, in awe, "would wait forever—an' ever—an' ever ——"

"Not one!"

"Not one?"

"Not one! 'Twould break the dear Lard's heart t' see un waitin' there."

I looked away to the furthest clouds, fast changing now, from gray to silver; and for a long time I watched them thin and brighten.

"Skipper Tommy," I asked, at last, "is *my* mother at the gate?"

"Ay," said he confidently.

"Waitin'?"

"Ay."

"An' for me?"

He gave me an odd look—searching my very soul with his mild old eyes. "Doesn't you think she is?" he asked.

"I knows it!" I cried.

Far off, at the horizon, the sky broke—and the rift broadened—and the clouds lifted—and the east flamed with colour—and all at once the rosy, hopeful light of dawn flushed the frowning sea.

"Look!" the skipper whispered.

"Ay," said I, "the day is broke."

"A new day!" said he.

XII

DOCTOR AND I

HOW the *St. Lawrence* came to stray from her course down the Strait I do not remember. As concerns such trivial things, the days that followed my mother's death are all misty in my mind; but I do recall (for when Skipper Tommy had made my mother's coffin he took me to the heads of Good Promise to see the sight) that the big seas of that day pounded the vessel to a shapeless wreck on the jagged rocks of the Reef of the Thirty Black Devils: where she lay desolate for many a day thereafter. But the sea was not quick enough to balk our folk of their salvage: all day long—even while the ship was going to pieces—they swarmed upon her; and they loaded their punts again and again, fearlessly boarding, and with infinite patience and courage managed to get their heaven-sent plunder ashore. 'Twas diverting to watch them; and when the twins, who had been among the most active at the wreck, came at last to their father, I laughed to know that, as Timmie said, they

had food enough ashore to keep the wrinkles out of their stomachs all winter.

Our harbour was for many days crowded with wrecked folk—strange of speech, of dress, of manners—who went about in flocks, prying into our innermost concerns, so that we were soon wearied of their perverse and insatiable curiosity, though we did not let them know it. They were sorry for my father and sister and me, I know, for, one and all, when they came to see my mother lying dead, they *said* they were. And they stood soberly by her shallow grave, when we laid her dear body away, and they wept when old Tom Tot spoke of the dust and ashes, which we are, and the stony earth rattled hopelessly on the coffin. Doubtless they were well-intentioned towards us all, and towards me, a motherless lad, more than any other, and doubtless they should be forgiven much, for they were but ignorant folk, from strange parts of the world; but I took it hard that they should laugh on the roads, as though no great thing had happened, and when, at last, the women folk took to praising my hair and eyes, as my mother used to do, and, moreover, to kissing me in public places, which had been my mother's privilege, I was speedily

scandalized and fled their proximity with great cunning and agility.

My father, however, sought them out, at all times and places, that he might tell them the tragic circumstances of my mother's death, and seemed not to remember that he had told them all before.

"But five days!" he would whisper, excitedly, when he had buttonholed a stranger in the shop. "Eh, man? Have you heared tell o' my poor wife?"

"Five days?"

"Ay; had you folk been wrecked five days afore —just five, mark you—she would have been alive, the day."

"How sad!"

"Five days!" my father would suddenly cry, wringing his hands. "My God! *Only five days!*"

A new expression of sympathy—and a glance of the sharpest suspicion—would escape the stranger.

"Five days!" my father would repeat, as though communicating some fact which made him peculiarly important to all the world. "That, now," with a knowing glance, "is what I calls wonderful queer."

My father was not the same as he had been. He was like a man become a child again—interested in little things, dreaming much, wondering more: conceiving himself, like a child, an object of deepest

interest to us all. No longer, now, did he command us, but, rather, sought to know from my sister (to whom he constantly turned) what he should do from hour to hour; and I thought it strange that he should do our bidding as though he had never been used to bidding us. But so it was; and, moreover (which I thought a great pity), he forgot that he was to kill the mail-boat doctor when the steamer put into our harbour on the southward trip—a purpose from which, a week before, Skipper Tommy Lovejoy could not dissuade him, though he tried for hours together. Ay, with his bare hands, my father was to have killed that man—to have wrung his neck and flung him overboard—but now there was no word of the deed: my father but puttered about, mildly muttering that the great ship had been wrecked five days too late.

I have said that my father loved my mother; it may be that he loved her overmuch—and, perhaps, that accounts for what came upon him when he lost her. I have since thought it sad that our hearts may contain a love so great that all the world seems empty when chance plucks it out; but the thought, no doubt, is not a wise one.

The doctor whom I had found with my father in my mother's room was not among the folk who bab-

bled on the roads and came prying into the stages with tiresome exclamations of "Really!" and "How in-tres-ting!" He kept aloof from them and from us all. All day long he wandered on the heads and hills of our harbour—a melancholy figure, conspicuous against the blue sky of those days: far off, solitary, bowed. Sometimes he sat for hours on the Watchman, staring out to sea, so still that it would have been small blame to the gulls had they mistaken him for a new boulder, mysteriously come to the hill; sometimes he lay sprawling on the high point of Skull Island, staring at the sky, lost to knowledge of the world around; sometimes he clambered down the cliffs of Good Promise to the water's edge, and stood staring, forever staring, at the breakers (which no man should do). Often I was not content with watching him from afar, but softly followed close, and peered at him from the shelter of a boulder or peeped over the shoulder of a hill; and so sad did he seem —so full of sighs and melancholy attitudes—that invariably I went home pitying: for at that time my heart was tender, and the sight of sorrow hurt it.

Once I crept closer and closer, and, at last, taking courage (though his clean-shaven face and soft gray hat abashed me), ran to him and slipped my hand in his.

He started; then, perceiving who it was, he with-

drew his hand with a wrench, and turned away: which hurt me.

"You are the son," said he, "of the woman who died, are you not?"

I was more abashed than ever—and wished I had not been so bold.

"I'm Davy Roth, zur," I whispered, for I was much afraid. "My mother's dead an' buried, zur."

"I saw you," said he, "in the room—that night."

There was a long pause. Then, "What's *your* name, zur?" I asked him.

"Mine?"

"Ay."

"Mine," said he, "is Luke ——"

He stopped—and thoughtfully frowned. I waited; but he said no more.

"Doctor Luke?" I ventured.

"Well," he drawled, "that will serve."

Then I thought I must tell him what was in my heart to say. Why not? The wish was good, and his soft, melancholy voice irresistibly appealed to my raw and childish sympathies.

"I wisht, zur," I whispered, looking down at my boots, through sheer embarrassment, "that you ——"

My tongue failed me. I was left in a sad lurch. He was not like our folk—not like our folk, at all—and I could not freely speak my mind.

"Yes?" he said, to encourage me.

"That you wasn't so sad," I blurted, with a rush, looking swift and deep into his gray eyes.

"Why not?" said he, taking my hand.

"I'm not wantin' you t' be."

He put his arm over my shoulder. "Why not?" he asked. "Tell me why not, won't you?"

The corners of my mouth fell. It may have been in sympathetic response to the tremolo of feeling in his voice. I was in peril of unmanly tears (as often chanced in those days)—and only women, as I knew, should see lads weep. I hid my face against him.

"Because, zur," I said, "it makes me sad, too!"

He sat down and drew me to his knee. "This is very strange," he said, "and very kind. You would not have me sad?" I shook my head. "I do not understand," he muttered. "It is very strange." (But it was not strange on our coast, where all men are neighbours, and each may without shame or offense seek to comfort the other.) Then he had me tell him tales of our folk, to which he listened with interest so eager that I quickly warmed to the diversion and chattered as fast as my tongue would wag. He laughed at me for saying "nar" for not (and the like) and I at him for saying "cawm" for calm; and soon we were very merry, and not only merry, but as intimate as friends of a lifetime. By and by I took

him to see the Soldier's Ear, which is an odd rock near the Rat Hole, and, after that, to listen to the sea coughing and gurgling at the bottom of Satan's Well. And in all this he forgot that he was sad—and I that my mother was dead.

"Will you walk with me to-morrow, Davy?" he asked, when I said that I must be off home.

"That I will, zur," said I.

"After breakfast."

"Ay, zur; a quarter of five."

"Well, no," he drawled. "Half after nine."

"'Tis a sheer waste o' time," I protested. "But 'twill suit me, zur, an it pleases you. My sister will tell *me* the hour."

"Your sister?" he asked, quickly.

"Bessie," said I.

"Ah," he exclaimed, "she was your sister. I saw her there—that night. And she is your sister?"

"You got it right," cried I, proudly. "*That's* my sister!"

He slapped me on the back (which shocked me, for our folk are not that playful); and, laughing heartily as he went, he took the road to Tom Tot's, where he had found food and housing for a time. I watched him from the turn in the road, as he went lightly down the slope towards South Tickle—his trim-clad, straight, graceful figure, broad-shouldered,

clean-cut, lithe in action, as compared with our lumbering gait; inefficient, 'tis true, but potentially strong. As I walked home, I straightened my own shoulders, held my head high, lifted my feet from the ground, flung bold glances to right and left, as I had seen him do: for, even then, I loved him very much. All the while I was exultantly conscious that a new duty and a new delight had come to me: some great thing, given of God—a work to do, a happiness to cherish. And that night he came and went in my dreams—but glorified: his smile not mirthless, his grave, gray eyes not overcast, his face not flabby and flushed, his voice not slow and sad, but vibrant with fine, live purpose. My waking thought was the wish that the man of the hills might be the man of my vision; and in my simple morning petition it became a prayer.

"Dear mama," I prayed, "there's something wrong along o' the man who come the night you died. He've managed somehow t' get wonderful sick. I'm not knowin' what ails un, or where he cotched it; but I sees it plain in his face: an' 'tis a woeful sickness. Do you make haste t' the throne o' God, please, mum, an' tell Un I been askin' you t' have un cured. You'd want un well, too, an you was here; an' the Lard 'll surely listen t' you, an' take your word for 't. Oh, do you pray the Lard, with

all your might an' main, dear mama, t' heal that man!"

In our land the works of the Lord are not obscured by what the hands of men have made. The twofold vision ranges free and far. Here are no brick walls, no unnatural need or circumstance, no confusing inventions, no gasping haste, no specious distractions, no clamour of wheel and heartless voices, to blind the soul, to pervert its pure desires, to deaden its fears, to deafen its ears to the sweeter calls—to shut it in, to shrivel it: to sicken it in every part. Rock and waste of sea and the high sweep of the sky—winds and rain and sunlight and flying clouds —great hills, mysterious distances, flaming sunsets, the still, vast darkness of night! These are the mighty works of the Lord, and of none other—unspoiled and unobscured. In them He proclaims Himself. They who have not known before that the heavens and the earth are the handiwork of God, here discover it: and perceive the Presence and the Power, and are ashamed and overawed. Thus our land works its marvel in the sensitive soul. I have sometimes thought that in the waste is sounded the great keynote of life—with which true hearts ever seek to vibrate in tune.

XIII

A SMILING FACE

"DOCTOR LUKE, zur," I said, as we walked that day, "I dreamed o' you, last night."

"Pleasantly, I hope?"

I sighed.

"What," said he, gravely, "did you dream of me?"

'Twas hard to frame a reply. "I been thinkin', since," I faltered, floundering in search of a simile, "that you're like a—like a ——"

"Like what?" he demanded.

I did not know. My eye sought everywhere, but found no happy suggestion. Then, through an opening in the hills, I caught sight of the melancholy wreck on the Reef of the Thirty Black Devils.

"I fear t' tell," said I.

He stopped. "But I wish to know," he persisted. "You'll tell me, Davy, will you not? It means so much."

"Like a wrecked ship," said I.

"Good God!" he exclaimed, starting from me.

At once he sent me home; nor would he have me

walk with him that afternoon, because, as he said, my sister would not allow me to bear him company, did she know as much as I had in some strange way divined.

Next day, armed with my sister's express permission, I overcame his scruples; and off we went to Red Indian Cave. Everywhere, indeed, we went together, while the wrecked folk waited the mail-boat to come—Doctor Luke and I—hand in hand—happy (for the agony of my loss came most in the night, when I lay wakeful and alone in my little bed) as the long, blue days. We roamed the hills, climbed the cliffs, clambered along shore; and once, to my unbounded astonishment and alarm, he stripped to the skin and went head first into the sea from the base of the Good Promise cliffs. Then nothing would content him but that I, too, should strip and plunge in: which I did (though you may think it extraordinary), lest he think me afraid to trust his power to save me. Thus the invigourating air, the yellow sunlight, the smiling sea beyond the rocks, the blue sky overhead, were separate delights in which our friendship ripened: so that at times I wondered what loneliness would overtake me when he had gone. I told him I wished he would not go away on the mail-boat, but would stay and live with

us, that, being a doctor, as he had said, he might heal our folk when they fell sick, and no one would die, any more. He laughed at that—but not because of merriment—and gripped my hand tighter, and I began to hope that, perhaps, he would not go away; but he did not tell me whether he would or not.

When the mail-boat was near due, my sister said that I must have the doctor to tea; for it would never do, said she, to accept his kindnesses and show no hospitality in return. In reply to this Doctor Luke said that I must present his compliments to my sister (which I thought a curious way of putting it), and say that he accepted the invitation with great pleasure; and, as though it were a matter of grave moment, he had me repeat the form until I knew it perfectly. That evening my sister wore a long skirt, fashioned in haste from one of my mother's gowns, and this, with my mother's keys, which she kept hanging from her girdle, as my mother used to do, made her very sweetly staid. The doctor came speckless, wearing his only shirt, which (as Tom Tot's wife made known to all the harbour) he had paid one dollar to have washed and ironed in three hours for the occasion, spending the interval (it was averred) in his room. While we

waited for the maids to lay the table, my sister moved in and out, directing them; and the doctor gazed at her in a way so marked that I made sure she had forgotten a hook or a button, and followed her to the kitchen to discover the omission.

"Sure, Bessie, dear," I began, very gingerly, "I'm fair dreadin' that you're—you're ——"

She was humming, in happy unconsciousness of her state; and I was chagrined by the necessity of disclosing it: but resolutely continued, for it must be done.

"Loose," I concluded.

She gave a little jump—a full inch, it may be—from the floor.

"Davy!" she cried, in mixed horror and distress. "Oh, dear! Whereabouts?"

"Do you turn around," said I, "an' I'll soon find out."

She whirled like a top. But I could find nothing awry. She was shipshape from head to toe.

"'Tis very queer," said I. "Sure, I thought you'd missed a button, for the doctor is lookin' at you all the time."

"At *me!*" she cried.

"Ay, at you."

She was then convinced with me that there was something amiss, and called the maids to our help,

for, as she said, I was only a boy (though a dear one), and ill schooled in such matters. But it turned out that their eyes were no sharper than mine. They pronounced her hooked and buttoned and pinned to the Queen's taste.

"'Tis queer, then," I persisted, when the maids had gone, "that he looks at you so hard."

"Is you sure he does?" she asked, much puzzled, "for," she added, with a little frown, "I'm not knowin' why he should."

"Nor I," said I.

At table we were very quiet, but none the less happy for that; for it seemed to me that my mother's gentle spirit hovered near, content with what we did. And after tea my father sat with the doctor on our platform, talking of disease and healing, until, in obedience to my sister's glance, I took our guest away to the harbour, to see (as I said) the greatest glories of the sunset: for, as I knew, my sister wished to take my father within, and change the current of his thought. Then I rowed the doctor to North Tickle, and let the punt lie in the swell of the open sea, where it was very solemn and quiet. The sky was heavy with drifting masses of cloud, aflare with red and gold and all the sunset colours, from the black line of coast, lying in the west, far into the east, where sea and sky were turning gray. Indeed,

it was very still, very solemn, lying in the long, crimson swell of the great deep, while the dusk came creeping over the sea.

"I do not wonder," the doctor muttered, with a shudder, "that the people who dwell here fear God."

There was something familiar to me in that feeling; but for the moment I could not make it out.

"Zur?" I said.

His eyes ranged timidly over the sombre waste—the vasty, splendid heavens, the coast, dark and unfeeling, the infinite, sullen sea, which ominously darkened as he looked—and he covered his face with his hands.

"No," he whispered, looking up, "I do not wonder that you believe in God—and fear Him!"

Then I knew that roundabout he felt the presence of an offended God.

"And fear Him!" he repeated.

I levelled my finger at him. "You been wicked!" I said, knowing that my accusation was true.

"Yes," he answered, "I have been wicked."

"Is you goin' t' be good?"

"I am going to try to be good—now."

"You isn't goin' away, is you?" I wailed.

"I am going to stay here," he said, gravely, "and treat the people, who need me, and try, in that way, to be good."

"I'd die t' see it!" cried I.

He laughed—and the tension vanished—and we went happily back to harbour. I had no thought that the resolution to which he had come was in any way extraordinary.

I ran to the Rat Hole, that night, to give the great news to Skipper Tommy Lovejoy and the twins. "Ecod!" the old man cried, vastly astounded. "Is he t' stay, now? Well, well! Then they's no need goin' on with the book. Ecod! now think o' that! An' 'tis all because your mother died, says you, when he might have saved her! Ah, Davy, the ways o' God is strange. He manages somehow t' work a blessin' with death an' wreck. 'I'm awful sorry for they poor children,' says He, 'an' for the owners o' that there fine ship; but I got t' have My way,' says He, 'or the world would never come t' much; so down goes the ship,' says He, 'an' up comes that dear mother t' my bosom. 'Tis no use tellin' them why,' says He, 'for they wouldn't understand. An', ecod!' says He, 'while I'm about it I'll just put it in the mind o' that doctor-man t' stay right there an' do a day's work or two for Me.' I'm sure He meant it—I'm sure He meant t' do just that—I'm sure 'twas all done o' purpose. We thinks He's hard an' a bit free an' careless. Ecod! they's

times when we thinks He fair bungles His job. He kills us, an' He cripples us, an' He starves us, an' He hurts our hearts; an' then, Davy, we says He's a dunderhead at runnin' a world, which, says we, we could run a sight better, if we was able t' make one. But the Lard, Davy, does His day's work in a seamanlike way, usin' no more crooked backs an' empty stomachs an' children's tears an' broken hearts than He can help. 'Tis little we knows about what *He's* up to. An' 'tis wise, I'm thinkin', not t' bother about tryin' t' find out. 'Tis better t' let Him steer His own course an' ask no questions. I just *knowed* He was up t' something grand. I said so, Davy! 'Tis just like the hymn, lad, about His hidin' a smilin' face behind a frownin' providence. Ah, Davy, *He'll* take care o' *we!*"

All of which, as you know, was quite characteristic of Skipper Tommy Lovejoy.

XIV

In The WATCHES of The NIGHT

AT once we established the doctor in our house, that he might be more comfortably disposed; and this was by my sister's wish, who hoped to be his helper in the sweet labour of healing. And soon a strange thing happened: once in the night—'twas late of a clear, still night—I awoke, of no reason; nor could I fall asleep again, but lay high on the pillow, watching the stars, which peeped in at my window, companionably winking. Then I heard the fall of feet in the house—a restless pacing: which brought me out of bed, in a twinkling, and took me tiptoeing to the doctor's room, whence the unusual sound. But first I listened at the door; and when I had done that, I dared not enter, because of what I heard, but, crouching in the darkness, must continue to listen . . . and listen . . .

By and by I crept away to my sister's room, unable longer to bear the awe and sorrow in my heart.

"Bessie!" I called, in a low whisper.

"Ay, Davy?"

"Is you awake?"

"Ay, I'm wakeful."

I closed the door after me—then went swiftly to her bedside, treading with great caution.

"Listenin'?" I asked.

"T' the doctor," she answered, "walkin' the floor."

"Is you afraid?" I whispered.

"No."

"I is."

She sat up in bed—and drew me closer. "An' why, dear?" she asked, stroking my cheek.

"Along o' what I heared in the dark, Bessie—at his door."

"You've not been eavesdroppin', Davy?" she chided.

"Oh, I wisht I hadn't!"

"'Twas not well done."

The moon was up, broadly shining behind the Watchman: my sister's white little room—kept sweet and dainty in the way she had—was full of soft gray light; and I saw that her eyes were wide and moist.

"He's wonderful restless, the night," she mused.

"He've a great grief."

"A grief? Oh, Davy!"

"Ay, a great, great grief! He've been talkin' to hisself, Bessie. But 'tis not words; 'tis mostly only sounds."

"Naught else?"

"Oh, ay! He've said ——"

"Hush!" she interrupted. "'Tis not right for me t' know. I would not have you tell ——"

I would not be stopped. "He've said, Bessie," I continued, catching something, it may be, of his agony, "he've said, 'I pay! Oh, God, I pay!' he've said. 'Merciful Christ, hear me—oh, I pay!'"

She trembled.

"'Tis some great grief," said I.

"Do you haste to his comfort, Davy," she whispered, quickly. "'Twould be a kind thing t' do."

"Is you sure he's wantin' me?"

"Were it me I would."

When I had got to the doctor's door again, I hesitated, as before, fearing to go in; and once more I withdrew to my sister's room.

"I'm not able t' go in," I faltered. "'Tis awful, Bessie, t' hear men goin' on—like that."

"Like what?"

"Cryin'."

A little while longer I sat silent with my sister—until, indeed, the restless footfalls ceased, and the blessed quiet of night fell once again.

"An', Bessie," said I, "he said a queer thing."

She glanced a question.

"He said your name!"

She was much interested—but hopelessly puzzled. For a moment she gazed intently at the stars. Then she sighed.

"He've a great grief," I repeated, sighing, "an' he've been wicked."

"Oh, no—not wicked!"

"Ay," I persisted, gently, "wicked; for he've told me so with his own tongue."

"Not wicked!"

"But he've *said* so," I insisted, nettled, on the instant, by my sister's perversity.

"I'm thinkin' he couldn't be," she said.

"Sure, why not?" I demanded.

She looked away for a moment—through the window, into the far, starlit sky, which the light of the moon was fast paling; and I thought my question forgot.

"Why not, sister?"

"I—don't know—why not!" she whispered.

I kissed my sister good-night, while yet she puzzled over this, and slipped off to my own room, lifting my night-dress, as I tiptoed along, lest I trip and by some clumsy commotion awake my friend to his bitterness. Once back in my bed—once again lying alone in the tranquil night—I found the stars still peeping in at my window, still twinkling com-

panionably, as I had left them. And I thought, as my mother had taught me, of these little watchmen, serene, constant, wise in their great remoteness—and of him who lay in unquiet sleep near by—and, then, understanding nothing of the mystery, nor caring to know, but now secure in the unquestioning faith of childhood, I closed my eyes to sleep: for the stars still shone on, flashing each its little message of serenity to the troubled world.

XV

THE WOLF

IN course of time, the mail-boat cleared our harbour of wrecked folk; and within three weeks of that day my father was cast away on Ill Wind Head: being alone on the way to Preaching Cove with the skiff, at the moment, for fish to fill out the bulk of our first shipment to the market at St. John's, our own catch having disappointed the expectation of us every one. My sister and I were then left to manage my father's business as best we could: which we must determine to do, come weal or woe, for we knew no other way. My sister said, moreover, that, whether we grew rich or poor, 'twas wise and kind to do our best, lest our father's folk, who had ever been loyal to his trade, come upon evil times at the hands of traders less careful of their welfare. Large problems of management we did not perceive, but only the simple, immediate labour, to which we turned with naively willing heads and hands, sure that, because of the love abroad in all the world, no evil would befall us.

"'Twill be fortune," my sister said, in her sweet

and hopeful way; "for the big world is good, Davy," said she, "to such as are bereft."

"I'm not so sure o' that."

"Ay," she repeated, unshaken, "the world is kind."

"You is but a girl, Bessie," said I, "an' not well acquaint with the way o' the world. Still an' all," I mused, "Skipper Tommy says 'tis kind, an' he've growed wonderful used t' livin'."

"We'll not fear the world."

"No, no! We'll not fear it. I'll be a man, sister, for your sake."

"An' I a true woman," said she, "for yours."

To Tom Tot we gave the handling of the fish and stores, resolving, also, to stand upon his judgment in the matter of dealing supplies to the thriftless and the unfortunate, whether generously or with a sparing hand, for the men of our harbour were known to him, every one, in strength and conscience and will for toil. As for the shop, said we, we would mind it ourselves, for 'twas but play to do it; and thus, indeed, it turned out: so hearty was the sport it provided that my sister and I would hilariously race for the big key (which hung on a high nail in the dining-room) whenever a customer came. I would not have you think us unfeeling. God knows, we were not that! 'Twas this way with us: each hid the pain,

and thus thought to deceive the other into a happier mood. We did well enough in the shop; but we could make neither head nor tail of the books in my father's safe; and when our bewilderment and heart-ache came to ears of the doctor he said that he would himself manage the letters and keep the books in the intervals of healing the sick: which, with a medicine chest they had brought ashore from the wreck, he had already begun to practice.

It seemed, then, to my sister and me, that the current of our life once more ran smooth.

And Jagger of Wayfarer's Tickle—the same who sat at cards with the mail-boat doctor and beat his dog with the butt of a whip—having got news of my father's death, came presently to our harbour, with that in mind which jumped ill with our plans. We had dispiriting weather: a raw wind bowled in from the northeast, whipping the fog apace; and the sea, as though worried out of patience, broke in a short, white-capped lop, running at cross purposes with the ground-swell. 'Twas evil sailing for small craft: so whence came this man's courage for the passage 'tis past me even now to fathom; for he had no liking to be at sea, but, rather, cursed the need of putting out, without fail, and lay prone below at such unhappy times as the sloop chanced to toss in rough

waters, praying all the time with amazing ferocity. Howbeit, across the bay he came, his lee rail smothered; and when he had landed, he shook his gigantic fist at the sea and burst into a triumphant bellow of blasphemy, most thrilling (as we were told) to hear: whereafter, with a large air (as of prospective ownership), he inspected the flakes and storehouses, heartily condemned them, wished our gaping crew to perdition, and, out of breath at last, moved up the path to our house, his great dog hanging like a shadow at his heels—having come and gone on the wharves, as Tom Tot said, like a gale o' wind.

My sister and I sat dreaming in the evening light —wherein, of soft shadows and western glory, fine futures may by any one be fashioned.

"'Tis rich," said I, "that *I'm* wantin' t' be."

"Not I," said she.

"Not you?"

"Not rich," she answered, "but helpful t' such as do the work o' the world."

"T' me, Bessie?"

"Ay," with a smile and half a sigh, "t' you."

"An' only me? I'd not be selfish with you. Is you wishin' t' be helpful—only t' me?"

"No."

"T' him?"

"An it please you," she softly answered.

"An' we t' you, Bessie!" I cried, in a rapture, kissing her plump little hand, which lay over my shoulder, convenient to my lips. "Ay, for your loving-kindness, my sister!"

"'Tis t' you, first of all, Davy," she protested, quickly, "that I'm wishin' t' be helpful; an' then t' him, an' then t' ——"

"T' who?" I demanded, frowning.

"All the world," said she.

"Very well," said I, much relieved to find that the interloper was no more to be dreaded. "I'll not mind *that*. 'Tis as you like. You'll help whomso you please—an' as many. For I'm t' be rich. Rich—look you! I'll have seven schooners t' sail the northern Labrador, as the doctor says. I'll never be content with less. Seven I'll have, my dear, t' fish from the Straits t' Chidley. I'll have the twins t' be masters o' two; but I'll sail the big one—the swift one—the hundred-tonner—ay, lass, I'll sail she, with me own hands. An', ecod! Bessie, *I'll* crack it on!"

"You'll not be rash, dear?" said she, anxiously.

"Rash!" laughed I. "I'll cut off the reef points! Rash? There won't be a skipper can carry sail with me! I'll get the fish—an' I'll see to it that my masters does. Then I'll push our trade north an' south. Ay, I will! Oh, I knows what I'll do, Bessie, for I been talkin' with the doctor, an' we got it split an'

dried. Hard work an' fair dealing, mum; that's what's t' do it. Our father's way, mum: honest scales on the wharf an' full weight at the counter. 'Twill be that or bust ——"

"Why, Davy," she exclaimed, her eyes flashing, "you're talkin' like a growed man!"

"Ay, ecod!" I boasted, flattered by the inference, "'twill not be many years afore we does more trade in our harbour than they does at the big stores o' Wayfarer's Tickle."

A low growl, coming from the shadows in the hall, brought me to a full stop; and upon the heels of that a fantastic ejaculation:

"Scuttle me!"

So sudden and savage the outburst, so raucous the voice, so charged with angry chagrin—the whole so incongruous with soft dreams and evening light—that 'twas in a shiver of terror my sister and I turned to discover whose presence had disturbed us.

The intruder stood in the door—a stubby, grossly stout man, thin-legged, thick-necked, all body and beard: clad below in tight trousers, falling loose, however, over the boots; swathed above in an absurdly inadequate pea-jacket, short in the sleeves and buttoned tight over a monstrous paunch, which laboured (and that right sturdily) to burst the bonds of

its confinement, but succeeded only in creating a vast confusion of wrinkles. His attitude was that of a man for the moment amazed beyond utterance: his head was thrown back, so that of his face nothing was to be seen but a short, ragged growth of iron-gray beard and a ridge of bushy eyebrow; his hands were plunged deep in his trousers pockets, which the fists distended; his legs, the left deformed (being bent inward at the knee), were spread wide. In the shadows beyond lurked a huge dog—a mighty, sullen beast, which came stepping up, with lowered head, to peer at us from between his master's legs.

"I'll be scuttled," said the man, bringing his head forward with a jerk, "if the little cock wouldn't cut into the trade o' Wayfarer's Tickle!"

Having thus in a measure mastered his amazement (and not waiting to be bidden), he emerged from the obscurity of the doorway, advanced, limping heavily, and sat himself in my father's chair, from which, his bandy legs comfortably hanging from the table, where he had disposed his feet, he regarded me in a way so sinister—with a glance so fixed and ill-intentioned—that his great, hairy face, malformed and mottled, is clear to me to this day, to its last pimple and wrinkle, its bulbous, flaming nose and bloodshot eyes, as though 'twere yesterday I saw it. And there he sat, puffing angrily, blowing his nose like a whale, scowling,

ejaculating, until (as I've no doubt) he conceived us to have been reduced to a condition of trepidation wherein he might most easily overmaster us.

"Scuttled!" he repeated, fetching his paunch a resounding thwack. "Bored!"

Thereupon he drew from the depths of his trousers pocket a disreputable clay pipe, filled it, got it alight, noisily puffed it, darting little glances at my sister and me the while, in the way of one outraged—now of reproach, now of righteous indignation, now betraying uttermost disappointment—for all the world as though he had been pained to surprise us in the thick of a conspiracy to wrong him, but, being of a meek and most forgiving disposition, would overlook the offense, though 'twas beyond his power, however willing the spirit, to hide the wound our guilt had dealt him. Whatever the object of this display, it gave me a great itching to retreat behind my sister's skirts, for fear and shame. And, as it appeared, he was quick to conjecture my feeling: for at once he dropped the fantastic manner and proceeded to a quiet and appallingly lucid statement of his business.

"I'm Jagger o' Wayfarer's Tickle," said he, "an' I'm come t' take over this trade."

"'Tis not for sale," my sister answered.

"I wants the trade o' this harbour," said he, ignoring her, "on my books. An' I got t' have it."

"We're wantin' my father's business," my sister persisted, but faintly now, "for Davy, when he's growed."

"I'm able t' buy you out," Jagger pursued, addressing the ceiling, "or run you out. 'Tis cheaper an' quicker t' buy you out. Now," dropping his eyes suddenly to my sister's, "how much are you askin' for this here trade?"

"'Tis not for sale."

"Not for sale?" roared he, jumping up.

"No, zur," she gasped.

"If I can't buy it," he cried, in a rage, driving the threat home with an oath peculiarly unfit for the ears of women, "I'll break it!"

Which brought tears to my tender sister's eyes; whereupon, with a good round oath to match his own, I flew at him, in a red passion, and, being at all times agile and now moved to extraordinary effort, managed to inflict some damage on his shins before he was well aware of my intention—and that so painful that he yelped like a hurt cur. But he caught me by the arms, which he jammed against my ribs, lifted me high, cruelly shaking me, and sat me on the edge of the table in a fashion so sudden and violent that my teeth came together with a snap: having done which, he trapped my legs with his paunch, and thus held me in durance impotent

and humiliating, so that I felt mean, indeed, to come to such a pass after an attack impetuously undertaken and executed with no little gallantry and effect. And he brought his face close to mine, his eyes flaring and winking with rage, his lips lifted from his yellow, broken teeth; and 'twas in his mind, as I perceived, to beat me as I had never been beaten before.

"Ye crab!" he began. "Ye little ——"

"The dog!" my sister screamed.

'Twas timely warning: for the dog was crouched in the hall, his muscles taut for the spring, his king-hairs bristling, his fangs exposed.

"Down!" shrieks Jagger.

The diversion released me. Jagger sprang away; and I saw, in a flash, that his concern was not for me, but for himself, upon whom the dog's baleful glance was fastened. There was now no ring of mastery in his voice, as there had been on the mail-boat, but the shiver of panic; and this, it may be, the dog detected, for he settled more alertly, pawing the floor with his forefeet, as though seeking firmer foothold from which to leap. As once before, I wished the beast well in the issue; indeed, I hoped 'twould be the throat and a fair grip! But Jagger caught a billet of wood from the box, and, with a hoarse, stifled cry—frightful to hear—drew back to

throw. Then the doctor's light step sounded in the hall, and in he came, brushing past the dog, which slunk away into the shadows. For a moment he regarded us curiously, and then, his brows falling in a quick frown, he laid his medicine case on my sister's sewing-machine, with never a word, and went to the window, where he stood idle, gazing out over the darkening prospect of sea and rock and upon great clouds flushed with lurid colour.

There was silence in the room—which none of us who waited found the will to break.

"Jagger"—said the doctor.

The voice was low—almost a drawl—but mightily authoritative: being without trace of feeling, but superior to passion, majestic.

"Ay, sir?"

"Go!"

The doctor still stood with his back to us, still gazed, continuing tranquil, through the broad window to the world without. And Jagger, overmastered by this confident assumption of authority, went away, as he was bidden, casting backward glances, ominous of machinations to come.

What Jagger uttered on my father's wharf—what on the deck of the sloop while he moored his dog to the windlass for a beating—what he flung back

while she gathered way—strangely moved Tom Tot, who hearkened, spellbound, until the last words of it (and the last yelp of the dog) were lost in the distance of North Tickle: it impelled the old man (as he has said many a time) to go wash his hands. But 'tis of small moment beside what the doctor said when informed of the occurrences in our house: being this, that he must have a partnership in our firm, because, first, it was in his heart to help my sister and me, who had been kind to him and were now like sheep fallen in with a wolf-pack, and second, because by thus establishing himself on the coast he might avert the suspicion of the folk from such good works as he had in contemplation.

"More than that," said he, "we will prove fair dealing possible here as elsewhere. It needs but courage and—money."

"I'm thinkin'," my sister said, "that Davy has the courage."

"And I," said he, "have the money."

I was very glad to hear it.

XVI

A MALADY of The HEART

IN the firelight of that evening—when the maids had cleared the cozy room and carried away the lamp and we three sat alone together in my father's house—was planned our simple partnership in good works and the fish business. 'Tis wonderful what magic is abroad at such times—what dreams, what sure hopes, lie in the flickering blaze, the warm, red glow, the dancing shadows; what fine aspirations unfold in hearts that are brave and hopeful and kind. Presently, we had set a fleet of new schooners afloat, put a score of new traps in the water, proved fair-dealing and prosperity the self-same thing, visited the sick of five hundred miles, established a hospital—transformed our wretched coast, indeed, into a place no longer ignorant of jollity and thrift and healing. The doctor projected all with lively confidence—his eyes aflash, his lean, white hand eloquent, his tongue amazingly active and persuasive—and with an insight so sagacious and well-informed, a purpose so pure and wise, that he revealed himself (though we did not think of it

then) not only as a man of heart but of conspicuous sense. It did not enter our minds to distrust him: because our folk are not sophisticated in polite overreaching, not given to the vice of suspicion, and because—well, he was what he was.

My sister's face was aglow—most divinely radiant—with responsive faith and enthusiasm; and as for me ——

"Leave me get down," I gasped, at last, to the doctor, "or I'll bust with delight, by heaven!"

He laughed, but unclasped his hands and let me slip from his knee; and then I began to strut the floor, my chest puffed out to twice its natural extent.

"By heaven!" I began. "If that Jagger ——"

The clock struck ten. "David Roth," my sister exclaimed, lifting her hands in mock horror, "'tis fair scandalous for a lad o' your years t' be up 't this hour!"

"Off to bed with you, you rascal!" roared the doctor.

"I'll not go," I protested.

"Off with you!"

"Not I."

"Catch un, doctor!" cried my sister.

"An you can, zur!" I taunted.

If he could? Ecod! He snatched at me, quick as a cat; but I dodged his hand, laughed in his face

and put the table between us. With an agility beyond compare—with a flow of spirits like a gale of wind—he vaulted the broad board. The great, grave fellow appeared of a sudden to my startled vision in midair—his arms and legs at sixes and sevens—his coat-tails flapping like a loose sail—his mouth wide open in a demoniacal whoop—and I dropped to the floor but in the bare nick of time to elude him. Uproarious pursuit ensued: it made my sister limp and pain-stricken and powerless with laughter; it brought our two maids from the kitchen and kept them hysterically screaming in the doorway, the lamp at a fearsome angle; it tumbled the furniture about with rollicking disregard, led the doctor a staggering, scrambling, leaping course in the midst of upturned tables and chairs, and, at last, ran the gasping quarry to earth under the sofa. I was taken out by the heels, shouldered, carried aloft and flung sprawling on my bed—while the whole house rang again with peal upon peal of hearty laughter.

"Oh, zur," I groaned, "I never knowed you was so jolly!"

"Not so?"

"On my word, zur!"

He sighed.

"I fancied you was never but sad."

"Ah, well," said he, "the Labrador, Davy, is evidently working a cure."

"God be thanked for that!" said I, devoutly.

He rumpled my hair and went out. And I bade him send my sister with the candle; and while I lay waiting in the dark a glow of content came upon me —because of this: that whereas I had before felt woefully inadequate to my sister's protection, however boastfully I had undertaken it, I was now sure that in our new partnership her welfare and peace of heart were to be accomplished. Then she came in and sat with me while I got ready for bed. She had me say my prayers at her knee, as a matter of course, but this night hinted that an additional petition for the doctor's well-doing and happiness might not be out of place. She chided me, after that, for the temper I had shown against Jagger and for the oath I had flung at his head, as I knew she would— but did not chide me heartily, because, as she said, she was for the moment too gratefully happy to remember my short-comings against me. I thanked her, then, for this indulgence, and told her that she might go to bed, for I was safely and comfortably bestowed, as she could see, and ready for sleep; but she would not go, and there sat, with the candle in her hand, her face flushed and her great blue eyes soulfully glowing, while she continued to chatter in

an incoherent and strangely irrelevant fashion: so that, astonished into broad wakefulness by this extraordinary behaviour, I sat bolt upright in bed, determined to discover the cause.

"Bessie Roth," said I, severely, "what's come upon you?"

"I'm not knowin', Davy," she answered, softly, looking away.

"'Tis somewhat awful, then," said I, in alarm, "for you're not lookin' me in the eye."

She looked then in her lap—and did not raise her eyes, though I waited: which was very strange.

"You isn't sick, is you?"

"No-o," she answered, doubtfully.

"Oh, you *mustn't* get sick," I protested. "'Twould *never* do. I'd fair die—if *you* got sick!"

"'Tisn't sickness; 'tis—I'm not knowin' what."

"Ah, come," I pleaded; "what is it, dear?"

"Davy, lad," she faltered, "I'm just—dreadful—happy."

"Happy?" cried I, scornfully. "'Tis not happiness! Why, sure, your lip is curlin' with grief!"

"But I *was* happy."

"You isn't happy now, my girl."

"No," she sobbed, "I'm wonderful miserable—now."

I kicked off the covers. "You've the fever, that's what!" I exclaimed, jumping out of bed.

"'Tis not that, Davy."

"Then—oh, for pity's sake, Bessie, tell your brother what's gone wrong along o' you!"

"I'm thinkin', Davy," she whispered, despairingly, "that I'm nothin' but a sinful woman."

"A—what! Why, Bessie——"

"Nothin'," she repeated, positively, "but a sinful, wicked person."

"Who told you that?" said I, dancing about in a rage.

"My own heart."

"Your heart!" cried I, blind angry. "'Tis a liar an it says so."

"What words!" she exclaimed, changed in a twinkling. "An' to your sister! Do you get back in bed this instant, David Roth, an' tell her that you're sorry."

I was loath to do it, but did, to pacify her; and when she had carried away the candle I chuckled, for I had cured her of her indisposition for that night, at any rate: as I knew, for when she kissed me 'twas plain that she was more concerned for her wayward brother than for herself.

Past midnight I was awakened by the clang of the bell on my father's wharf. 'Twas an unpleasant sound. Half a gale—no less—could do it. I then

knew that the wind had freshened and veered to the southeast; and I listened to determine how wild the night. Wild enough! The bell clanged frequently, sharply, jangling in the gusts—like an anxious warning. My window was black; there was no light in the sky—no star shining. Rain pattered on the roof. I heard the rush of wind. 'Twas inevitable that I should contrast the quiet of the room, the security of my place, the comfort of my couch and blankets, with a rain-swept, heaving deck and a tumultuous sea. A gusty night, I thought—thick, wet, with the wind rising. The sea would be in a turmoil on the grounds by dawn: there would be no fishing; and I was regretting this—between sleep and waking—when the bell again clanged dolefully. Roused, in a measure, I got ear of men stumbling up the path. I was into my breeches before they had trampled half the length of the platform—well on my way down the dark stair when they knocked on the door—standing scared in the light of their lantern, the door open, before they found time to hail.

I was addressed by a gray old man in ragged oilskins. "We heared tell," said he, mildly, wiping his dripping beard, "that you got a doctor here."

I said that we had.

"Well," he observed, in a dull, slow voice, "we got a sick man over there t' Wreck Cove."

"Ay?" said I.

"An' we was sort o' wonderin', wasn't we, Skipper Tom," another put in, "how much this doctor would be askin' t' go over an' cure un?"

"Well, ay," the skipper admitted, taking off his sou'wester to scratch his head, "we *did* kind o' have that idea."

"'Tis a wild night," said I: in my heart doubting —and that with shame—that the doctor would venture out upon the open sea in a gale of wind.

"'Tis *not* very civil," said the skipper frankly. "I'm free t' say," in a drawl, "that 'tis—well—rather —dirty."

"An' he isn't got used t' sailin' yet. But——"

"No?" in mild wonder. "Isn't he, now? Well, we got a stout little skiff. Once she gets past the Thirty Devils, she'll maybe make Wreck Cove, all right—if she's handled proper. Oh, she'll maybe make it if——"

"Davy!" my sister called from above. "Do you take the men through t' the kitchen. I'll rouse the doctor an' send the maids down t' make tea."

"Well, now, thank you kindly, miss," Skipper Tom called up to the landing. "That's wonderful kind."

It was a familiar story—told while the sleepy maids put the kettle on the fire and the fury of the gale increased. 'Twas the schooner *Lucky Fisher-*

man, thirty tons, Tom Lisson master, hailing from Burnt Harbour of the Newfoundland Green Bay, and fishing the Labrador at Wreck Cove, with a tidy catch in the hold and four traps in the water. There had been a fine run o' fish o' late; an' Bill Sparks, the splitter—with a brood of ten children to grow fat or go hungry on the venture—labouring without sleep and by the light of a flaring torch, had stabbed his right hand with a fish bone. The old, old story—now so sadly threadbare to me—of ignorance and uncleanliness! The hand was swollen to a wonderful size and grown wonderful angry—the man gone mad of pain—the crew contemplating forcible amputation with an axe. Wonderful sad the mail-boat doctor wasn't nowhere near! Wonderful sad if Bill Sparks must lose his hand! Bill Sparks was a wonderful clever hand with the splittin'-knife —able t' split a wonderful sight o' fish a minute. Wonderful sad if Bill Sparks's family was to be throwed on the gov'ment all along o' Bill losin' his right hand! Wonderful sad if poor Bill Sparks ——

The doctor entered at that moment. "Who is asking for me?" he demanded, sharply.

"Well," Skipper Tom drawled, rising, "we was thinkin' we'd sort o' like t' see the doctor."

"I am he," the doctor snapped. "Yes?" inquiringly.

"We was wonderin', doctor," Skipper Tom answered, abashed, "what you'd charge t' go t' Wreck Cove an'—an'—well, use the knife on a man's hand."

"Charge? Nonsense!"

"We'd like wonderful well," said the skipper, earnestly, "t' have you ——"

"But—*to-night!*"

"You see, zur," said the skipper, gently, "he've wonderful pain, an' he've broke everything breakable that we got, an' we've got un locked in the fo'c's'le, an' ——"

"Where's Wreck Cove?"

"'Tis t' the s'uth'ard, zur," one of the men put in. "Some twelve miles beyond the Thirty Devils."

The doctor opened the kitchen door and stepped out. There was no doubt about the weather. A dirty gale was blowing. Wind and rain drove in from the black night; and, under all the near and petty noises, sounded the great, deep roar of breakers.

"Hear that?" he asked, excitedly, closing the door against the wind.

"Ay," the skipper admitted; "as I was tellin' the young feller, it *isn't* so *very* civil."

"Civil!" cried the doctor.

"No; not so civil that it mightn't be a bit civiller; but, now ——"

"And twelve miles of open sea!"

"No, zur—no; not accordin' t' my judgment. Eleven an' a half, zur, would cover it."

The doctor laughed.

"An', as I was sayin', zur," the skipper concluded, pointedly, "we just come through it."

My sister and I exchanged anxious glances: then turned again to the doctor—who continued to stare at the floor.

"Just," one of the crew repeated, blankly, for the silence was painful, "come through it."

The doctor looked up. "Of course, you know," he began, quietly, with a formal smile, "I am not—accustomed to this sort of—professional call. It—rather—takes my breath away. When do we start?"

Skipper Tom took a look at the weather. "Blowin' up wonderful," he observed, quietly, smoothing his long hair, which the wind had put awry. "Gets real dirty long about the Thirty Devils in the dark. Don't it, Will?"

Will said that it did—indeed, it did—no doubt about that, *what*ever.

"I s'pose," the skipper drawled, in conclusion, "we'd as lief get underway at dawn."

"Very good," said the doctor. "And—you were asking about my fee—were you not? You'll have to pay, you know—if you can—for I believe in—that sort of thing. Could you manage three dollars?"

"We was 'lowin'," the skipper answered, "t' pay about seven when we sold the v'y'ge in the fall. 'Tis a wonderful bad hand Bill Sparks has got."

"Let it be seven," said the doctor, quickly. "The balance may go, you know, to help some poor devil who hasn't a penny. Send it to me in the fall if——"

The skipper looked up in mild inquiry.

"Well," said the doctor, with a nervous smile, "if we're all here, you know."

"Oh," said the skipper, with a large wave of the hand, "*that's God's* business."

They put out at dawn—into a sea as wild as ever I knew an open boat to brave. The doctor bade us a merry good-bye; and he waved his hand, shouting that which the wind swept away, as the boat darted off towards South Tickle. My sister and I went to the heads of Good Promise to watch the little craft on her way. The clouds were low and black—torn by the wind—driving up from the southwest like mad: threatening still heavier weather. We followed the skiff with my father's glass—saw her beat bravely on, reeling through the seas, smothered in spray—until she was but a black speck on the vast, angry waste, and, at last, vanished altogether in the spume and thickening fog. Then we went back to my father's house, prayerfully wishing the doctor safe voyage to

Wreck Cove; and all that day, and all the next, while the gale still blew, my sister was nervous and downcast, often at the window, often on the heads, forever sighing as she went about the work of the house. And when I saw her thus distraught and colourless—no warm light in her eyes—no bloom on her dimpled cheeks—no merry smile lurking about the corners of her sweet mouth—I was fretted beyond description; and I determined this: that when the doctor got back from Wreck Cove I should report her case to him, whether she liked it or not, with every symptom I had observed, and entreat him, by the love and admiration in which I held him, to cure her of her malady, whatever the cost.

On the evening of the third day, when the sea was gone down and the wind was blowing fair and mild from the south, I sat with my sister at the broad window, where was the outlook upon great hills, and upon sombre water, and upon high, glowing sky—she in my mother's rocker, placidly sewing, as my mother used to do, and I pitifully lost in my father's armchair, covertly gazing at her, in my father's way.

"Is you better, this even, sister, dear?" I asked.

"Oh, ay," she answered, vehemently, as my mother used to do. "Much better."

"You're wonderful poorly."

"'Tis true," she said, putting the thread between her white little teeth. "But," the strand now broken, "though you'd not believe it, Davy, dear, I'm feeling —almost—nay, quite—well."

I doubted it. "'Tis a strange sickness," I observed, with a sigh.

"Yes, Davy," she said, her voice falling, her lips pursed, her brows drawn down. "I'm not able t' make it out, at all. I'm feelin'—so wonderful—queer."

"Is you, dear?"

"Davy Roth," she averred, with a wag of the head so earnest that strands of flaxen hair fell over her eyes, and she had to brush them back again, "I never felt so queer in all my life afore!"

"I'm dreadful worried about you, Bessie."

"Hut! as for that," said she, brightly, "I'm not thinkin' I'm goin' t' *die*, Davy."

"Sure, you never can tell about sickness," I sagely observed.

"Oh, no!" said she. "I isn't got that—kind o'—sickness."

"Well," I insisted, triumphantly, "you're wonderful shy o' eatin' pork."

She shuddered.

"I wished I knowed what you had," I exclaimed impatiently.

"I wished you did," she agreed, frankly, if somewhat faintly. "For, then, Davy, you'd give me a potion t' cure me."

She drew back the curtain—for the hundredth time, I vow—and peered towards South Tickle.

"What you lookin' for?" I asked.

"I was thinkin', Davy," she said, still gazing through the window, "that Skipper Zach Tupper might be comin' in from the Last Chance grounds with a fish for breakfast."

The Last Chance grounds? 'Twas ignorance beyond belief! "Bessie," I said, with heat, "is you gone mad? Doesn't you know that no man in his seven senses would fish the Last Chance grounds in a light southerly wind? Why——"

"Well," she interrupted, with a pretty pout, "you knows so well as me that Zach Tupper haven't *got* his seven senses."

"Bessie!"

She peeked towards South Tickle again; and then —what a wonder-worker the divine malady is!—she leaned eagerly forward, her sewing falling unheeded to the floor; and her soft breast rose and fell to a rush of sweet emotion, and her lips parted in delicious wonderment, and the blood came back to her cheeks, and her dimples were no longer pathetic, but eloquent of sweetness and innocence, and her eyes

turned moist and brilliant, glowing with the glory of womanhood first recognized, tender and pure. Ah, my sister—lovely in person but lovelier far in heart and mind—adorably innocent—troubled and destined to infinitely deeper distress before the end—brave and true and hopeful through all the chequered course of love! You had not known, dear heart, but then discovered, all in a heavenly flash, what sickness you suffered of.

"Davy!" she whispered.

"Ay, dear?"

"I'm knowin'—now—what ails me."

I sat gazing at her in love and great awe. "'Tis not a wickedness, Bessie," I declared.

"No, no!"

"'Tis not that. No, no! I knows 'tis not a sin."

"'Tis a holy thing," she said, turning, her eyes wide and solemn.

"A holy thing?"

"Ay—holy!"

I chanced to look out of the window. "Ecod!" I cried. "The Wreck Cove skiff is in with Doctor Luke!"

Unfeeling, like all lads—in love with things seen—I ran out.

The doctor came ashore at the wharf in a state of

wild elation. He made a rush for me, caught me up, called to the crew of the skiff to come to the house for tea—then shouldered me, against my laughing protest, and started up the path.

"I'm back, safe and sound," cried he. "Davy, I have been to Wreck Cove and back."

"An' you're wonderful happy," cried I, from the uncertain situation of his shoulder.

"Happy? That's the word, Davy. I'm happy! And why?"

"Tell me."

"I've done a good deed. I've saved a man's right hand. I've done a good deed for once," he repeated, between his teeth, "by God!"

There was something contagious in all this; and (I say it by way of apology) I was ever the lad to catch at a rousing phrase.

"A good deed!" I exclaimed. "By God, you'll do ——"

He thrashed me soundly on the spot.

XVII

HARD PRACTICE

I BORE him no grudge—the chastisement had been fairly deserved: for then, being loosed from parental restraint, I was by half too fond of aping the ways and words of full-grown men; and I was not unaware of the failing. However, the prediction on the tip of my tongue—that he would live to do many another good deed—would have found rich fulfillment had it been spoken. It was soon noised the length of the coast that a doctor dwelt in our harbour—one of good heart and skill and courage: to whom the sick of every station might go for healing. In short space the inevitable came upon us: punts put in for the doctor at unseasonable hours, desperately reckless of weather; schooners beat up with men lying ill or injured in the forecastles; the folk of the neighbouring ports brought their afflicted to be miraculously restored, and ingenuously quartered their dying upon us. A wretched multitude emerged from the hovels—crying, "Heal us!" And to every varied demand the doctor freely responded, smiling heartily, God bless him! spite of wind and weather: ready, active,

merry, untiring—sad but when the only gift he bore was that of tender consolation.

One night there came a maid from Punch Bowl Harbour. My sister sent her to the shop, where the doctor was occupied with the accounts of our business, myself to keep him company. 'Twas a raw, black night; and she entered with a gust of wind, which fluttered the doctor's papers, set the lamp flaring, and, at last, escaped by way of the stove to the gale from which it had strayed.

"Is you the doctor?" she gasped.

She stood with her back against the door, one hand still on the knob and the other shading her eyes—a slender slip of a girl, her head covered with a shawl, now dripping. Whisps of wet black hair clung to her forehead, and rain-drops lay in the flushed hollows of her cheeks.

"I am," the doctor answered, cheerily, rising from his work.

"Well, zur," said she, "I'm Tim Hodd's maid, zur, an' I'm just come from the Punch Bowl in the bait-skiff, zur—for healin'."

"And what, my child," asked the doctor, sympathetically, "may be the matter with you?"

Looking back—with the added knowledge that I have—it seems to me that he had no need to ask the

question. The flush and gasp told the story well enough, quite well enough: the maid was dying of consumption.

"Me lights is floatin', zur," she answered.

"Your lights?"

"Ay, zur," laying a hand on her chest. "They're floatin' wonderful high. I been tryin' t' kape un down; but, zur, 'tis no use, at all."

With raised eyebrows the doctor turned to me. "What does she mean, Davy," he inquired, "by her 'lights'?"

"I'm not well knowin'," said I; "but if 'tis what *we* calls 'lights,' 'tis what *you* calls 'lungs.'"

The doctor turned sadly to the maid.

"I been takin' shot, zur, t' weight un down," she went on; "but, zur, 'tis no use, at all. An' Jim Butt's my man," she added, hurriedly, in a low voice. "I'm t' be married to un when he comes up from the Narth. Does you think——"

She paused—in embarrassment, perhaps: for it may be that it was the great hope of this maid, as it is of all true women of our coast, to live to be the mother of sons.

"Go on," the doctor quietly said.

"Oh, does you think, zur," she said, clasping her hands, a sob in her voice, "that you can cure me—afore the fleet—gets home?"

"Davy," said the doctor, hoarsely, "go to your sister. I must have a word with this maid—alone."

I went away.

We caught sight of the *Word of the Lord* beating down from the south in light winds—and guessed her errand—long before that trim little schooner dropped anchor in the basin. The skipper came ashore for healing of an angry abscess in the palm of his hand. Could the doctor cure it? To be sure—the doctor could do *that!* The man had suffered sleepless agony for five days; he was glad that the doctor could ease his pain—glad that he was soon again to be at the fishing. Thank God, he was to be cured!

"I have only to lance and dress it," said the doctor. "You will have relief at once."

"Not the knife," the skipper groaned. "Praise God, I'll not have the knife!"

It was the doctor's first conflict with the strange doctrines of our coast. I still behold—as I lift my eyes from the page—his astonishment when he was sternly informed that the way of the Lord was not the way of a surgeon with a knife. Nor was the austere old fellow to be moved. The lance, said he, was an invention of the devil himself—its use plainly a defiance of the purposes of the Creator. Thank

God! he had been reared by a Christian father of the old school.

"No, no, doctor!" he declared, his face contorted by pain. "I'm thankin' you kindly; but I'm not carin' t' interfere with the decrees o' Providence."

"But, man," cried the doctor, "I *must* ——"

"No!" doggedly. "I'll not stand in the Lard's way. If 'tis His will for me t' get better, I'll get better, I s'pose. If 'tis His blessed will for me t' die," he added, reverently, "I'll have t' die."

"I give you my word," said the doctor, impatiently, "that if that hand is not lanced you'll be dead in three days."

The man looked off to his schooner.

"Three days," the doctor repeated.

"I'm wonderful sorry," sighed the skipper, "but I got t' stand by the Lard."

And he *was* dead—within three days, as we afterwards learned: even as the doctor had said.

Once, when the doctor was off in haste to Cuddy Cove to save the life of a mother of seven—the Cuddy Cove men had without a moment's respite pulled twelve miles against a switch of wind from the north and were streaming sweat when they landed—once, when the doctor was thus about his beneficent busi-

ness, a woman from Bowsprit Head brought her child to be cured, incredulous of the physician's power, but yet desperately seeking, as mothers will. She came timidly—her ailing child on her bosom, where, as it seemed to me, it had lain complaining since she gave it birth.

"I'm thinkin' he'll die," she told my sister.

My sister cried out against this hopelessness. 'Twas not kind to the dear Lord, said she, thus to despair.

"They says t' Bowsprit Head," the woman persisted, "that he'll die in a fit. I'm—I'm—not wantin' him," she faltered, "t' die—like that."

"No, no! He'll not!"

She hushed the child in a mechanical way—being none the less tender and patient the while—as though her arms were long accustomed to the burden, her heart used to the pain.

"There haven't ever been no child," said she, looking up, after a moment, "like this—afore—t' Bowsprit Head."

My sister was silent.

"No," the woman sighed; "not like this one."

"Come, come, ma'm!" I put in, confidently. "Do you leave un t' the doctor. *He'll* cure un."

She looked at me quickly. "What say?" she said, as though she had not understood.

"I says," I repeated, "that the doctor will cure that one."

"Cure un?" she asked, blankly.

"That he will!"

She smiled—and looked up to the sky, smiling still, while she pressed the infant to her breast. "They isn't nobody," she whispered, "not nobody, ever said that—afore—about my baby!"

Next morning we sat her on the platform to wait for the doctor, who had now been gone three days. "He does better in the air," said she. "He—he—*needs* air!" It was melancholy weather—thick fog, with a drizzle of rain: the wind in the east, fretful and cold. All morning long she rocked the child in her arms: now softly singing to him—now vainly seeking to win a smile—now staring vacantly into the mist, dreaming dull dreams, while he lay in her lap.

"He isn't come through the tickle, have he?" she asked, when I came up from the shop at noon.

"He've not been sighted yet."

"I'm thinkin' he'll be comin' soon."

"Ay; you'll not have t' wait much longer."

"I'm not mindin' *that*," said she, "for I'm used t' waitin'."

The doctor came in from the sea at evening—when the wind had freshened to a gale, blowing bit-

ter cold. He had been for three days and nights fighting without sleep for the life of that mother of seven—and had won! Ay, she had pulled through; she was now resting in the practiced care of the Cuddy Cove women, whose knowledge of such things had been generously increased. The ragged, sturdy seven still had a mother to love and counsel them. The Cuddy Cove men spoke reverently of the deed and the man who had done it. Tired? The doctor laughed. Not he! Why, he had been asleep under a tarpaulin all the way from Cuddy Cove! And Skipper Elisha Timbertight had handled the skiff in the high seas so cleverly, so tenderly, so watchfully—what a marvellous hand it was!—that the man under the tarpaulin had not been awakened until the nose of the boat touched the wharf piles. But the doctor was hollow-eyed and hoarse, staggering of weariness, but cheerfully smiling, as he went up the path to talk with the woman from Bowsprit Head.

"You are waiting for me?" he asked.

She was frightened—by his accent, his soft voice, his gentle manner, to which the women of our coast are not used. But she managed to stammer that her baby was sick.

"'Tis his throat," she added.

The child was noisily fighting for breath. He

gasped, writhed in her lap, struggled desperately for air, and, at last, lay panting. She exposed him to the doctor's gaze—a dull-eyed, scrawny, ugly babe: such as mothers wish to hide from sight.

"He've always been like that," she said. "He's wonderful sick. I've fetched un here t' be cured."

"A pretty child," said the doctor.

'Twas a wondrous kind lie—told with such perfect dissimulation that it carried the conviction of truth.

"What say?" she asked, leaning forward.

"A pretty child," the doctor repeated, very distinctly.

"They don't say that t' Bowsprit Head, zur."

"Well—*I* say it!"

"I'll tell un so!" she exclaimed, joyfully. "I'll tell un you said so, zur, when I gets back t' Bowsprit Head. For nobody—nobody, zur—ever said that afore—about my baby!"

The child stirred and complained. She lifted him from her lap—rocked him—hushed him—drew him close, rocking him all the time.

"Have you another?"

"No, zur; 'tis me first."

"And does he talk?" the doctor asked.

She looked up—in a glow of pride. And she flushed gloriously while she turned her eyes once

more upon the gasping, ill-featured babe upon her breast.

"He said 'mama'—once!" she answered.

In the fog—far, far away, in the distances beyond Skull Island, which were hidden—the doctor found at that moment some strange interest.

"Once?" he asked, his face still turned away.

"Ay, zur," she solemnly declared. "I calls my God t' witness! I'm not makin' believe, zur," she went on, with rising excitement. "They says t' Bowsprit Head that I dreamed it, zur, but I knows I didn't. 'Twas at the dawn. He lay here, zur—here, zur—on me breast. I was wide awake, zur—waitin' for the day. Oh, he said it, zur," she cried, crushing the child to her bosom. "I heared un say it! 'Mama!' says he."

"When I have cured him," said the doctor, gently, "he will say more than that."

"What say?" she gasped.

"When I have taken—something—out of his throat—with my knife—he will be able to say much more than that. When he has grown a little older, he will say, 'Mama, I loves you!'"

The woman began to cry.

There is virtue for the city-bred, I fancy, in the clean salt air and simple living of our coast—and,

surely, for every one, everywhere, a tonic in the performance of good deeds. Hard practice in fair and foul weather worked a vast change in the doctor. Toil and fresh air are eminent physicians. The wonder of salty wind and the hand-to-hand conflict with a northern sea! They gave him health, a clear-eyed, brown, deep-breathed sort of health, and restored a strength, broad-shouldered and lithe and playful, that was his natural heritage. With this new power came joyous courage, indomitability of purpose, a restless activity of body and mind. He no longer carried the suggestion of a wrecked ship; however afflicted his soul may still have been, he was now, in manly qualities, the man the good God designed—strong and bonnie and tender-hearted: betraying no weakness in the duties of the day. His plans shot far beyond our narrow prospect, shaming our blindness and timidity, when he disclosed them; and his interests—searching, insatiable, reflective—comprehended all that touched our work and way of life: so that, as Tom Tot was moved to exclaim, by way of an explosion of amazement, 'twas not long before he had mastered the fish business, gill, fin and liver. And he went about with hearty words on the tip of his tongue and a laugh in his gray eyes—merry the day long, whatever the fortune of it. The children ran out of the cottages to greet him as he passed by, and

a multitude of surly, ill-conditioned dogs, which yielded the road to no one else, accepted him as a distinguished intimate. But still, and often—late in the night—my sister and I lay awake listening to the disquieting fall of his feet as he paced his bedroom floor. And sometimes I crept to his door—and hearkened—and came away, sad that I had gone.

When—autumn being come with raw winds and darkened days—the doctor said that he must go an errand south to St. John's and the Canadian cities before winter settled upon our coast, I was beset by melancholy fears that he would not return, but, enamoured anew of the glories of those storied harbours, would abandon us, though we had come to love him, with all our hearts. Skipper Tommy Lovejoy joined with my sister to persuade me out of these drear fancies: which (said they) were ill-conceived; for the doctor must depart a little while, else our plans for the new sloop and little hospital (and our defense against Jagger) would go all awry. Perceiving, then, that I would not be convinced, the doctor took me walking on the bald old Watchman, and there shamed me for mistrusting him: saying, afterwards, that though it might puzzle our harbour and utterly confound his greater world, which must now be informed, he had in truth cast his

lot with us, for good and all, counting his fortune a happy one, thus to come at last to a little corner of the world where good impulses, elsewhere scrawny and disregarded, now flourished lustily in his heart. Then with delight I said that I would fly the big flag in welcome when the returning mail-boat came puffing through the Gate. And scampering down the Watchman went the doctor and I, hand in hand, mistrust fled, to the very threshold of my father's house, where my sister waited, smiling to know that all went well again.

Past ten o'clock of a dismal night we sat waiting for the mail-boat—unstrung by anxious expectation: made wretched by the sadness of the parting.

"There she blows, zur!" cried Skipper Tommy, jumping up. "We'd best get aboard smartly, zur, for she'll never come through the Gate this dirty night."

The doctor rose, and looked, for a strained, silent moment, upon my dear sister, but with what emotion, though it sounded the deeps of passion, I could not then conjecture. He took her hand in both of his, and held it tight, without speaking. She tried, dear heart! to meet his ardent eyes—but could not.

"I'm wishin' you a fine voyage, zur," she said, her voice fallen to a tremulous whisper.

He kissed the hand he held.

"T' the south," she added, with a swift, wondering look into his eyes, "an' back."

"Child," he began with feeling, "I ——"

In some strange passion my sister stepped from him. "Call me that no more!" she cried, her voice broken, her eyes wide and moist, her little hands clinched.

"Why, child!" the doctor exclaimed. "I ——

"I'm *not* a child!"

The doctor turned helplessly to me—and I in bewilderment to my sister—to whom, again, the doctor extended his hands, but now with a frank smile, as though understanding that which still puzzled me.

"Sister ——" said he.

"No, no!"

'Twas my nature, it may be, then to have intervened; but I was mystified and afraid—and felt the play of some great force, unknown and dreadful, which had inevitably cut my sister off from me, her brother, keeping her alone and helpless in the midst of it—and I quailed and kept silent.

"Bessie!"

She took his hand. "Good-bye, zur," she whispered, turning away, flushed.

"Good-bye!"

The doctor went out, with a new mark upon him; and I followed, still silent, thinking it a poor farewell

my sister had given him, but yet divining, serenely, that all this was beyond the knowledge of lads. I did not know, when I bade the doctor farewell and Godspeed, that his heart tasted such bitterness as, God grant! the hearts of men do seldom feel, and that, nobility asserting itself, he had determined never again to return: fearing to bring my sister the unhappiness of love, rather than the joy of it. When I had put him safe aboard, I went back to the house, where I found my sister sorely weeping—not for herself, she sobbed, but for him, whom she had wounded.

XVIII

SKIPPER TOMMY GETS A LETTER

IT came from the north, addressed, in pale, sprawling characters, to Skipper Tommy Lovejoy of our harbour—a crumpled, greasy, ill-odoured missive: little enough like a letter from a lady, bearing (as we supposed) a coy appeal to the tender passion. But ——

"Ay, Davy," my sister insisted. "'Tis from *she*. Smell it for yourself."

I sniffed the letter.

"Eh, Davy?"

"Well, Bessie," I answered, doubtfully, "I'm not able t' call t' mind this minute just how she *did*. But I'm free t' say," regarding the streaks and thumb-marks with quick disfavour, "that it *looks* a lot like her."

My sister smiled upon me with an air of loftiest superiority. "Smell it again," said she.

"Well," I admitted, after sniffing long and carefully, "I does seem t' have got wind o' ——"

"There's no deceivin' a woman's nose," my sister declared, positively. "'Tis a letter from the woman t' Wolf Cove."

"Then," said I, with a frown, "we'd best burn it."

She mused a moment. "He never got a letter afore," she said, looking up.

"Not many folk has," I objected.

"He'd be wonderful proud," she continued, "o' just gettin' a letter."

"But she's a wily woman," I protested, in warning, "an' he's a most obligin' man. I fair shiver t' think o' leadin' un into temptation."

"'Twould do no harm, Davy," said she, "just t' *show* un the letter."

"'Tis a fearful responsibility t' take."

"'Twould please un so!" she wheedled.

"Ah, well!" I sighed. "You're a wonderful hand at gettin' your own way, Bessie."

When the punts of our folk came sweeping through the tickles and the Gate, in the twilight of that day, I went with the letter to the Rat Hole: knowing that Skipper Tommy would by that time be in from the Hook-an'-Line grounds; for the wind was blowing fair from that quarter. I found the twins pitching the catch into the stage, with great hilarity—a joyous, frolicsome pair: in happy ignorance of what impended. They gave me jolly greeting: whereupon, feeling woefully guilty, I sought the skipper in the

house, where he had gone (they said) to get out of his sea-boots.

I was not disposed to dodge the issue. "Skipper Tommy," said I, bluntly, "I got a letter for you."

He stared.

"'Tis no joke," said I, with a wag, "as you'll find, when you gets t' know where 'tis from; but 'tis nothin' t' be scared of."

"Was you sayin', Davy," he began, at last, trailing off into the silence of utter amazement, "that you—been—gettin'—a——"

"I was sayin'," I answered, "that the mail-boat left you a letter."

He came close. "Was you sayin'," he whispered in my ear, with a jerk of his head to the north, "that 'tis from——"

I nodded.

"*She?*"

"Ay."

He put his tongue in his cheek—and gave me a slow, sly wink. "Ecod!" said he.

I was then mystified by his strange behaviour: this occurring while he made ready for the splitting-table. He chuckled, he tweaked his long nose until it flared, he scratched his head, he sighed, he scowled, he broke into vociferous laughter; and he muttered

"Ecod!" an innumerable number of times, voicing, thereby, the gamut of human emotions and the degrees thereof, from lowest melancholy to a crafty sort of cynicism and thence to the height of smug elation. And, presently, when he had peered down the path to the stage, where the twins were forking the fish, he approached, stepping mysteriously, his gigantic forefinger raised in a caution to hush.

"Davy," he whispered, "you isn't got that letter *aboard* o' you, is you?"

My heart misgave me; but—I nodded.

"Well, well!" cried he. "I'm thinkin'," he added, his surprise somewhat mitigated by curiosity, "that you'll be havin' it in your jacket pocket."

"Ay," was my sharp reply; "but I'll not read it."

"No, no!" said he, severely, lifting a protesting hand, which he had now encased in a reeking splitting-mit. "I'd not *have* you read it. Sure, I'd never 'low *that!* Was you thinkin', David Roth," now so reproachfully that my doubts seemed treasonable, "that I'd *want* you to? Me—that nibbled once? Not I, lad! But as you *does* happen t' have that letter in your jacket, you wouldn't mind me just takin' a *look* at it, would you?"

I produced the crumpled missive—with a sigh: for the skipper's drift was apparent.

"My letter!" said he, gazing raptly. "Davy, lad,

I'd kind o'—like t'—just t'—*feel* it. They wouldn't be no hurt in me *holdin'* it, would they?"

I passed it over.

"Now, Davy," he declared, his head on one side, the letter held gingerly before him, "I wouldn't read that letter an I could. No, lad—not an I could! But I've heared tell she had a deal o' l'arnin'; an' I'd kind o'—like t'—take a peek inside. Just," he added, hurriedly, "t' see what power she had for writin'."

This pretense to a purely artistic interest in the production was wondrously trying to the patience.

"Skipper Davy," he went on, awkwardly, skippering me with a guile that was shameless, "it bein' from a woman—bein' from a *woman*, now, says I—'twould be no more 'n po-lite t' open it. Come, now, Davy!" he challenged. "You wouldn't *say* 'twould be more 'n po-lite, would you? It bein' from a lone woman?"

I made no answer: for, at that moment, I caught sight of the twins, listening with open-mouthed interest from the threshold.

"I wonders, Davy," the skipper confided, taking the leap, at last, "what she've gone an' writ!"

"Jacky," I burst out, in disgust, turning to the twins, "I just *knowed* he'd get t' wonderin'!"

Skipper Tommy started: he grew shamefaced, all in a moment; and he seemed now first conscious of guilty wishes.

"Timmie," said Jacky, hoarsely, from the doorway, "she've writ."

"Ay, Jacky," Timmie echoed, "she've certain gone an' done it."

They entered.

"I been—sort o'—gettin' a letter, lads," the skipper stammered: a hint of pride in his manner. "It come ashore," he added, with importance, "from the mail-boat."

"Dad," Timmie asked, sorrowfully, "is you been askin' Davy t' read that letter?"

"Well, no, Timmie," the skipper drawled, tweaking his nose; "'tisn't quite so bad. But I been wonderin' ——"

"Oh, is you!" Jacky broke in. "Timmie," said he, grinning, "dad's been wonderin'!"

"Is he?" Timmie asked, assuming innocence. "Wonderin'?"

"Wasn't you sayin' so, dad?"

"Well," the skipper admitted, "havin' *said* so, I'll not gainsay it. I *was* wonderin'——"

"An' you *knowin'*," sighed Timmie, "that you're an obligin' man!"

"Dad," Jacky demanded, "didn't the Lard kindly send a switch o' wind from the sou'east t' save you oncet?"

The skipper blushed uneasily.

"Does you think," Timmie pursued, "that He'll turn His hand *again* t' save you?"

"Well ——"

"Look you, dad," said Jacky, "isn't you got in trouble enough all along o' wonderin' too much?"

"Well," the skipper exclaimed, badgered into self-assertion, "I *was* wonderin'; but since you two lads come in I been *thinkin'*. Since them two twins o' mine come in, Davy," he repeated, turning to me, his eyes sparkling with fatherly affection, "I been thinkin' 'twould be a fine plan t' tack this letter t' the wall for a warnin' t' the household agin the wiles o' women!"

Timmie and Jacky silently embraced—containing their delight as best they could, though it pained them.

"Not," the skipper continued, "that I'll have a word said agin' that woman: which I won't," said he, "nor no other. The Lard knowed what He was about. He made them with His own hands, an' if *He* was willin' t' take the responsibility, us men can do no less than stand by an' weather it out. 'Tis my own idea that He was more sot on fine lines than sailin' qualities when He whittled His model. 'I'll make a craft,' says He, 'for looks, an' I'll pay no heed,' says He, 't' the cranks she may have, hopin' for the best.' An' He done it! That He did! They're tidy craft—oh, ay, they're wonderful tidy craft—but 'tis Lard help un in a gale o' wind! An' the Lard

made *she*," he continued, reverting to the woman from Wolf Cove, "after her kind, a woman, acquaint with the wiles o' women, actin' accordin' t' nature An'," he declared, irrelevantly, "*'tis* gettin' close t' winter, an' *'twould* be comfortable t' have a man t' tend the fires. She *do* be of a designin' turn o' mind," he proceeded, "which is accordin' t' the nature o' women, puttin' no blame on her, an' she's not a wonderful lot for looks an' temper; but," impressively lifting his hand, voice and manner awed, "she've l'arnin', which is ek'al t' looks, if not t' temper. So," said he, "we'll say nothin' agin' her, but just tack this letter t' the wall, an' go split the fish. But," when the letter had thus been disposed of, "I wonder what ——"

"Come on, dad!"

He put an arm around each of the grinning twins, and Timmie put an arm around me; and thus we went pell-mell down to the stage, where we had an uproarious time splitting the day's catch.

You must know, now, that all this time we had been busy with the fish, dawn to dark; that beyond our little lives, while, intent upon their small concerns, we lived them, a great and lovely work was wrought upon our barren coast: as every year, unfailingly, to the glory of God, who made such hearts as beat under

the brown, hairy breasts of our men. From the Strait to Chidley, our folk and their kin from Newfoundland with hook and net reaped the harvest from the sea—a vast, sullen sea, unwilling to yield: sourly striving to withhold the good Lord's bounty from the stout and merry fellows who had with lively courage put out to gather it. 'Twas catch and split and stow away! In the dawn of stormy days and sunny ones —contemptuous of the gray wind and reaching seas—the skiffs came and went. From headland to headland—dodging the reefs, escaping the shifting peril of ice, outwitting the drifting mists—little schooners chased the fish. Wave and rock and wind and bergs —separate dangers, allied with night and fog and sleety rain—were blithely encountered. Sometimes, to be sure, they wreaked their purpose; but, notwithstanding, day by day the schooners sailed and the skiffs put out to the open, and fish were cheerily taken from the sea. Spite of all, the splitting-knives flashed, and torches flared on the decks and in the mud huts ashore. Barren hills—the bleak and uninhabited places of the northern coast—for a season reflected the lurid glow and echoed the song and shout. Thanks be to God, the fleet was loading!

In the drear autumn weather a cloud of sail went to the s'uth'ard — doughty little schooners, decks awash: beating up to the home ports.

XIX

The FATE of The MAIL-BOAT DOCTOR

MY flag flapped a welcome in the sunny wind as the mail-boat came creeping through the Gate and with a great rattle and splatter dropped anchor in the basin off my father's wharf: for through my father's long glass I had from the summit of the Watchman long before spied the doctor aboard. He landed in fine fettle—clear-eyed, smiling, quick to extend his strong, warm hand: having cheery words for the folk ashore, and eager, homesick glances for the bleak hills of our harbour. Ecod! but he was splendidly glad to be home. I had as lief fall into the arms of a black bear as ever again to be greeted in a way so careless of my breath and bones! But, at last, with a joyous little laugh, he left me to gasp myself to life again, and went bounding up the path. I managed to catch my wind in time to follow; 'twas in my mind to spy upon his meeting with my sister; nor would I be thwarted: for I had for many days been troubled by what happened when they parted, and now heartily wished the unhappy difference forgot. So from a corner of

the hillside flake I watched lynx-eyed; but I could detect nothing amiss—no hint of ill-feeling or reserve: only frank gladness in smile and glance and handclasp. And being well content with this, I went back to the wharf to lend Tom Tot a hand with the landing of the winter supplies, the medical stores, the outfit for the projected sloop: all of which the doctor had brought with him from St. John's.

"And not only that," said the doctor, that night, concluding his narrative of busy days in the city, "but I have been appointed," with a great affectation of pomposity, "the magistrate for this district!"

We were not impressed. "The magistrate?" I mused. "What's that?"

"What's a magistrate!" cried he.

"Ay," said I. "I never seed one."

"The man who enforces the law, to be sure!"

"The law?" said I. "What's that?"

"The law of the land, Davy," he began, near dumbfounded, "is for the——"

My sister got suddenly much excited. "I've heard tell about magistrates," she interrupted, speaking eagerly, the light dancing merrily in her eyes. "Come, tell me! is they able t'——"

She stuttered to a full stop, blushing. "Out with it, my dear," said I.

"Marry folk?" she asked.

"They may," said the doctor.

"Oh, Davy!"

"Whoop!" screamed I, leaping up. "You're never tellin' me that! Quick, Bessie! Come, doctor! They been waitin' this twenty year."

I caught his right hand, Bessie his left; and out we dragged him, paying no heed to his questions, which, by and by, he abandoned, because he laughed so hard. And down the path we sped—along the road—by the turn to Cut-Throat Cove—until, at last, we came to the cottage of Aunt Amanda and Uncle Joe Bow, whom we threw into a fluster with our news. When the doctor was informed of the exigency of the situation, he married them on the spot, improvising a ceremony, without a moment's hesitation, as though he had been used to it all his life: a family of six meanwhile grinning with delight and embarrassment.

"You sees, zur," Uncle Joe explained, when 'twas over, "we never had no chance afore. 'Manda an' me was down narth when the last parson come this way. An' 'Manda she've been wantin'——"

"T' have it done," Aunt Amanda put in, patting the curly head of the smallest Bow, "afore——"

"Ay," said Uncle Joe, "wantin' t' have it done, shipshape, afore she——"

"Died," Aunt Amanda concluded.

By this time the amazing news had spread. Far and near the guns were popping a salute—which set the dogs a-howling: so that the noise was heart-rending. Presently the neighbours began to gather: whereupon (for the cottage was small) we took our leave, giving the pair good wishes for the continuance of a happy married life. And when we got to our house we found waiting in the kitchen Mag Trawl, who had that day brought her fish from Swampy Arm—a dull girl, slatternly, shiftless: the mother of two young sons.

"I heared tell," she drawled, addressing the doctor, but looking elsewhere, "that you're just after marryin' Aunt Amanda."

The doctor nodded.

"I 'low," she went on, after an empty pause, "that I wants t' get married, too."

"Where's the man?"

"Jim he 'lowed two year ago," she said, staring at the ceiling, "that we'd go south an' have it done this season if no parson come."

"Bring the man," said the doctor, briskily.

"Well, zur," said she, "Jim ain't here. You couldn't do it 'ithout Jim bein' here, could you?"

"Oh, no!"

"I 'lowed you might be able," she said, with a lit-

tle sigh, "if you tried. But you couldn't, says you?"

"No."

"Jim he 'lowed two year ago it ought t' be done. You couldn't do it nohow?"

The doctor shook his head.

"Couldn't make a shift at it?"

"No."

"Anyhow," she sighed, rising to go, "I 'low Jim won't mind now. He's dead."

Within three weeks the mail-boat touched our harbour for the last time that season: being then southbound into winter quarters at St. John's. It chanced in the night—a clear time, starlit, but windy, with a high sea running beyond the harbour rocks. She came in by way of North Tickle, lay for a time in the quiet water off our wharf, and made the open through the Gate. From our platform we watched the shadowy bulk and warm lights slip behind Frothy Point and the shoulder of the Watchman—hearkened for the last blast of the whistle, which came back with the wind when the ship ran into the great swell of the sea. Then—at once mustering all our cheerfulness—we turned to our own concerns: wherein we soon forgot that there was any world but ours, and were content with it.

Tom Tot came in.

"'Tis late for you, Tom," said my sister, in surprise.

"Ay, Miss Bessie," he replied, slowly. "Wonderful late for me. But I been home talkin' with my woman," he went on, "an' we was thinkin' it over, an' she s'posed I'd best be havin' a little spell with the doctor."

He was very grave—and sat twirling his cap: lost in anxious thought.

"You're not sick, Tom?"

"Sick!" he replied, indignantly. "Sure, I'd not trouble the doctor for that! I'm troubled," he added, quietly, looking at his cap, "along—o' Mary."

It seemed hard for him to say.

"She've been in service, zur," he went on, turning to the doctor, "at Wayfarer's Tickle. An' I'm fair troubled—along o' she."

"She've not come?" my sister asked.

For a moment Tom regarded the floor—his gaze fixed upon a protruding knot. "She weren't aboard, Miss Bessie," he answered, looking up, "an' she haven't sent no word. I been thinkin' I'd as lief take the skiff an' go fetch her home."

"Go the morrow, Tom," said I.

"I was thinkin' I would, Davy, by your leave. Not," he added, hastily, "that I'm afeared she've

come t' harm. She's too scared o' hell for that. But—I'm troubled. An' I'm thinkin' she might—want a chance—home."

He rose.

"Tom," said I, "do you take Timmie Lovejoy an' Will Watt with you. You'll need un both t' sail the skiff."

"I'm thankin' you, Davy, lad," said he. "'Tis kind o' you t' spare them."

"An' I'm wishin' you well."

He picked at a thread in his cap. "No," he persisted, doggedly, "she were so wonderful scared o' hell she fair *couldn't* come t' harm. I brung her up too well for that. But," with a frown of anxious doubt, "the Jagger crew was aboard, bound home t' Newf'un'land. An'—well—I'm troubled. They was drunk—an' Jagger was drunk—an' I asked un about my maid—an' . . ."

"Would he tell you nothing?" the doctor asked.

"Well," said Tom, turning away, "he just laughed."

We were at that moment distracted by the footfall of men coming in haste up the path from my father's wharf. 'Twas not hard to surmise their errand. My sister sighed—I ran to the door—the doctor began at once to get into his boots and great-coat. But, to our surprise, two deck-hands from the mail-boat pushed their way into the room. She had re-

turned (said they) and was now waiting off the Gate. There was need of a doctor aboard. Need of a doctor! What of the mail-boat doctor? Ah, 'twas he who was in need. My heart bounded to hear it! And how had he come to that pass? He had essayed to turn in—but 'twas rough water outside—and he had caroused with Jagger's crew all the way from Wayfarer's Tickle—and 'twas very rough water—and he had fallen headlong down the companion—and they had picked him up and put him in his berth, where he lay unconscious.

'Twas sweet news to me. "You'll not go?" I whispered to the doctor.

He gave me a withering glance—and quietly continued to button his greatcoat.

"Is you forgot what I told you?" I demanded, my voice rising.

He would not reply.

"Oh, don't go!" I pleaded.

He turned up the collar of his coat—picked up his little black case of medicines. Then I feared that he meant indeed to go.

"Leave un die where he lies, zur!" I wailed.

"Come along, men!" said he to the deck-hands.

I sprang ahead of them—flung the door shut—put my back against it: crying out against him all the while. My sister caught my wrist—I pushed her

away. Tom Tot laid his hand on my shoulder—I threw it off with an oath. My heart was in a flame of rage and resentment. That this castaway should succour our enemy! I saw, again, a great, wet sweep of deck, glistening underfoot—heard the rush of wind, the swish of breaking seas, the throb and clank of engines, the rain on the panes—once again breathed the thick, gray air of a cabin where two men sat at cards—heard the curse and blow and outcry—saw my mother lying on the pillows, a red geranium in her thin, white hand—heard her sigh and whisper: felt anew her tender longing.

"You'll *not* go!" I screamed. "Leave the dog t' die!"

Very gently, the doctor put his arm around me, and gave me to my sister, who drew me to her heart, whispering soft words in my ear: for I had no power to resist, having broken into sobs. Then they went out: and upon this I broke roughly from my sister, and ran to my own room; and I threw myself on my bed, and there lay in the dark, crying bitterly—not because the doctor had gone his errand against my will, but because my mother was dead, and I should never hear her voice again, nor touch her hand, nor feel her lips against my cheek. And there I lay alone, in deepest woe, until the doctor came again; and when I heard him on the stair—

and while he drew a chair to my bed and felt about for my hand—I still sobbed: but no longer hated him, for I had all the time been thinking of my mother in a better way.

"Davy," he said, gravely, "the man is dead."

"I'm glad!" I cried.

He ignored this. "I find it hard, Davy," said he, after a pause, "not to resent your displeasure. Did I not know you so well—were I less fond of the real Davy Roth—I should have you ask my pardon. However, I have not come up to tell you that; but this: you can, perhaps, with a good heart hold enmity against a dying man; but the physician, Davy, may not. Do you understand, Davy?"

"I'm sorry I done what I did, zur," I muttered, contritely. "But I'm wonderful glad the man's dead."

"For shame!"

"I'm glad!"

He left me in a huff.

"An' I'll *be* glad," I shouted after him, at the top of my voice, "if I got t' go 't hell for it!"

'Twas my nature.

Tom Tot returned downcast from Wayfarer's Tickle: having for three days sought his daughter, whom he could not find; nor was word of her any-

where to be had. Came, then, the winter—with high winds and snow and short gray days: sombre and bitter cold. Our folk fled to the tilts at the Lodge; and we were left alone with the maids and Timmie Lovejoy in my father's house: but had no idle times, for the doctor would not hear of it, but kept us at work or play, without regard for our wishes in the matter. 'Twas the doctor's delight by day to don his new skin clothes (which my sister had finished in haste after the first fall of snow) and with help of Timmie Lovejoy to manage the dogs and komatik, flying here and there at top speed, with many a shout and crack of the long whip. By night he kept school in the kitchen, which we must all diligently attend, even to the maids: a profitable occupation, no doubt, but laborious, to say the least of it, though made tolerable by his good humour. By and by there came a call from Blister Harbour, which was forty miles to the north of us, where a man had shot off his hand—another from Red Cove, eighty miles to the south—others from Backwater Arm and Molly's Tub. And the doctor responded, afoot or with the dogs, as seemed best at the moment: myself to bear him company; for I would have it so, and he was nothing loath.

XX

CHRISTMAS EVE at TOPMAST TICKLE

RETURNING afoot from the bedside of Long John Wise at Run-by-Guess—and from many a bedside and wretched hearth by the way—the doctor and I strapped our packs aback and heartily set out from the Hudson's Bay Company's post at Bread-and-Water Bay in the dawn of the day before Christmas: being then three weeks gone from our harbour, and, thinking to reach it next day. We were to chance hospitality for the night; and this must be (they told us) at the cottage of a man of the name of Jonas Jutt, which is at Topmast Tickle. There was a lusty old wind scampering down the coast, with many a sportive whirl and whoop, flinging the snow about in vast delight—a big, rollicking winter's wind, blowing straight out of the north, at the pitch of half a gale. With this abeam we made brave progress; but yet 'twas late at night when we floundered down the gully called Long-an'-Deep, where the drifts were overhead and each must rescue the other from sudden misfortune: a warm glimmer of light in Jonas Jutt's kitchen window to guide and hearten us.

The doctor beat the door with his fist. "Open, open!" cried he, still furiously knocking. "Good Lord! will you never open?"

So gruff was the voice, so big and commanding—and so sudden was the outcry—and so late was the night and wild the wind and far away the little cottage—that the three little Jutts, who then (as it turned out) sat expectant at the kitchen fire, must all at once have huddled close; and I fancy that Sammy blinked no longer at the crack in the stove, but slipped from his chair and limped to his sister, whose hand he clutched.

"We'll freeze, I tell you!" shouted the doctor. "Open the —— Ha! Thank you," in a mollified way, as Skipper Jonas opened the door; and then, most engagingly: "May we come in?"

"An' welcome, zur," said the hearty Jonas, "whoever you be! 'Tis gettin' t' be a wild night."

"Thank you. Yes—a wild night. Glad to catch sight of your light from the top of the hill. We'll leave the racquets here. Straight ahead? Thank you. I see the glow of a fire."

We entered.

"Hello!" cried the doctor, stopping short. "What's this? Kids? Good! Three of them. Ha! How are you?"

The manner of asking the question was most in-

dignant, not to say threatening; and a gasp and heavy frown accompanied it. By this I knew that the doctor was about to make sport for Martha and Jimmie and Sammy Jutt (as their names turned out to be): which often he did for children by pretending to be in a great rage; and invariably they found it delicious entertainment, for however fiercely he blustered, his eyes twinkled most merrily all the time, so that one was irresistibly moved to chuckle with delight at the sight of them, no matter how suddenly or how terribly he drew down his brows.

"I like kids," said he, with a smack of the lips. "I eat 'em!"

Gurgles of delight escaped from the little Jutts—and each turned to the other: the eyes of all dancing.

"And how are *you?*" the doctor demanded.

His fierce little glance was indubitably directed at little Sammy, as though, God save us! the lad had no right to be anything *but* well, and ought to be, and should be, birched on the instant if he had the temerity to admit the smallest ache or pain from the crown of his head to the soles of his feet. But Sammy looked frankly into the flashing eyes, grinned, chuckled audibly, and lisped that he was better.

"Better?" growled the doctor, searching Sammy's white face and skinny body as though for evidence to the contrary. "I'll attend to *you!*"

Thereupon Skipper Jonas took us to the shed, where we laid off our packs and were brushed clean of snow; and by that time Matilda Jutt, the mother of Martha and Jimmie and Sammy, had spread the table with the best she had—little enough, God knows! being but bread and tea—and was smiling beyond. Presently there was nothing left of the bread and tea; and then we drew up to the fire, where the little Jutts still sat, regarding us with great interest. And I observed that Martha Jutt held a letter in her hand: whereupon I divined precisely what our arrival had interrupted, for I was Labrador born, and knew well enough what went on in the kitchens of our land of a Christmas Eve.

"And now, my girl," said the doctor, "what's what?"

By this extraordinary question—delivered, as it was, in a manner that called imperatively for an answer—Martha Jutt was quite nonplussed: as the doctor had intended she should be.

"What's what?" repeated the doctor.

Quite startled, Martha lifted the letter from her lap. "He's not comin,' zur," she gasped, for lack of something better.

"You're disappointed, I see," said the doctor. "So he's not coming?"

"No, zur—not this year."

"That's too bad. But you mustn't mind it, you know—not for an instant. What's the matter with him?"

"He've broke his leg, zur."

"What!" cried the doctor, restored of a sudden to his natural manner. "Poor fellow! How did he come to do that?"

"Catchin' one o' they wild deer, zur."

"Catching a deer!" the doctor exclaimed. "A most extraordinary thing. He was a fool to try it. How long ago?"

"Sure, it can't be more than half an hour; for he've——"

The doctor jumped up. "Where is he?" he demanded, with professional eagerness. "It can't be far. Davy, I must get to him at once. I must attend to that leg. Where is he?"

"Narth Pole, zur," whispered Sammy.

"Oh-h-h!" cried the doctor; and he sat down again, and pursed his lips, and winked at Sammy in a way most peculiar. "I *see!*"

"Ay, zur," Jimmie rattled, eagerly. We're fair disappointed that he's not——"

"Ha!" the doctor interrupted. "I see. Hum! Well, now!" And having thus incoherently exclaimed for a little, the light in his eyes growing merrier all the time, he most unaccountably worked

himself into a great rage: whereby I knew that the little Jutts were in some way to be mightily amused. "The lazy rascal!" he shouted, jumping out of his chair, and beginning to stamp the room, frowning terribly. "The fat, idle, blundering dunderhead! Did they send you that message? Did they, now? Tell me, did they? Give me that letter!" He snatched the letter from Martha's lap. "Sammy," he demanded, "where did this letter come from?"

"Narth Pole, zur!"

Jonas Jutt blushed—and Matilda threw her apron over her head to hide her confusion.

"And *how* did it come?"

"Out o' the stove, zur."

The doctor opened the letter, and paused to slap it angrily, from time to time, as he read it.

North poll

DEER MARTHA

few lines is to let you know on acounts of havin broke me leg cotchin the deer Im sory im in a stat of helth not bein able so as to be out in hevy wether. hopin you is all wel as it leves me

yrs respectful

SANDY CLAWS

Fish was poor and it would not be much this yere anyways. tel little Sammy

"Ha!" shouted the doctor, as he crushed the letter to a little ball and flung it under the table.

"Ha! That's the kind of thing that happens when one's away from home. There you have it! Discipline gone to the dogs. System gone to the dogs. Everything gone to the dogs. Now, what do you think of that?"

He scowled, and gritted his teeth, and puffed, and said "Ha!" in a fashion so threatening that one must needs have fled the room had there not been a curiously reassuring twinkle in his eyes.

"What do you think of that?" he repeated, fiercely, at last. "A countermanded order! I'll attend to *him!*" he burst out. "I'll fix that fellow! The lazy dunderhead, I'll soon fix him! Give me pen and ink. Where's the paper? Never mind. I've some in my pack. One moment, and I'll——"

He rushed to the shed, to the great surprise and alarm of the little Jutts, and loudly called back for a candle, which Skipper Jonas carried to him; and when he had been gone a long time, he returned with a letter in his hand, still ejaculating in a great rage.

"See that?" said he to the three little Jutts. "Well, *that's* for Santa Claus's clerk. That'll fix *him.* That'll blister the stupid fellow."

"Please, zur!" whispered Martha Jutt.

"Well?" snapped the doctor, stopping short in a rush to the stove.

"Please, zur," said Martha, taking courage, and laying a timid hand on his arm. "Sure, I don't know what 'tis all about. I don't know what blunder he've made. But I'm thinkin', zur, you'll be sorry if you acts in haste. 'Tis wise t' count a hundred. Don't be too hard on un, zur. 'Tis like the blunder may be mended. 'Tis like he'll do better next time. Don't be hard ——"

"*Hard* on him?" the doctor interrupted. "Hard on *him!* Hard on that ——"

"Ay, zur," she pleaded, looking fearlessly up. "Won't you count a hundred?"

"Count it," said he, grimly.

Martha counted. I observed that the numbers fell slower—and yet more slowly—from her lips, until (and she was keenly on the watch) a gentler look overspread the doctor's face; and then she rattled them off, as though she feared he might change his mind once more.

"—— an' a hundred!" she concluded, breathless.

"Well," the doctor drawled, rubbing his nose, "I'll modify it," whereupon Martha smiled, "just to 'blige *you*," whereupon she blushed.

So he scratched a deal of the letter out; then he sealed it, strode to the stove, opened the door, flung the letter into the flames, slammed the door, and

turned with a wondrously sweet smile to the amazed little Jutts.

"There!" he sighed. "I think that will do the trick. We'll soon know, at any rate."

We waited, all very still, all with eyes wide open, all gazing fixedly at the door of the stove. Then, all at once—and in the very deepest of the silence—the doctor uttered a startling "Ha!" leaped from his chair with such violence that he overturned it, awkwardly upset Jimmie Jutt's stool and sent the lad tumbling head over heels (for which he did not stop to apologize); and there was great confusion: in the midst of which the doctor jerked the stove door open, thrust in his arm, and snatched a blazing letter straight from the flames—all before Jimmie and Martha and Sammy Jutt had time to recover from the daze into which the sudden uproar had thrown them.

"There!" cried the doctor, when he had managed to extinguish the blaze. "We'll just see what's in this. Better news, I'll warrant."

You may be sure that the little Jutts were blinking amazement. There could be no doubt about the authenticity of *that* communication. And the doctor seemed to know it: for he calmly tore the envelope open, glanced the contents over, and turned to Martha, the broadest of grins wrinkling his face.

"Martha Jutt," said he, "will you *please* be good enough to read *that*."

And Martha read:

North Pole, Dec. 24, 10:18 P. M.

To Captain Blizzard,
Jonas Jutt's Cottage, Topmast Tickle,
Labrador Coast.

RESPECTED SIR:

Regret erroneous report. Mistake of a clerk in the Bureau of Information. Santa Claus got away at 9:36. Wind blowing due south, strong and fresh.

SNOW, Chief Clerk.

Then there was a great outburst of glee. It was the doctor who raised the first cheer. Three times three and a tiger! And what a tiger it was! What with the treble of Sammy, which was of the thinnest description, and the treble of Martha, which was full and sure, and the treble of Jimmie, which dangerously bordered on a cracked bass, and what with Matilda's cackle and Skipper Jonas's croak and my own hoorays and the doctor's gutteral uproar (which might have been mistaken for a very double bass)—what with all this, as you may be sure, the shout of the wind was nowhere. Then we joined hands—it was the doctor who began it by catching Martha and Matilda—and danced the table round, shaking our feet and tossing our arms, the glee ever more uproarious—danced until we were breathless, every one,

save little Sammy, who was not asked to join the gambol, but sat still in his chair, and seemed to expect no invitation.

"Wind blowing due south, strong and fresh," gasped Jimmie, when, at last, we sat down. "He'll be down in a hurry, with they swift deer. My! but he'll just *whizz* in this gale!"

"But 'tis sad 'tis too late t' get word to un," said Martha, the smile gone from her face.

"Sad, is it?" cried the doctor. "Sad! What's the word you want to send?"

"'Tis something for Sammy, zur."

Sammy gave Martha a quick dig in the ribs. "'N' mama," he lisped, reproachfully.

"Ay, zur; we're wantin' it bad. An' does you think us could get word to un? For Sammy, zur?"

"'N' mama," Sammy insisted.

"We can try, at any rate," the doctor answered, doubtfully. "Maybe we can catch him on the way down. Where's that pen? Here we are. Now!"

He scribbled rapidly, folded the letter in great haste, and dispatched it to Santa Claus's clerk by the simple process of throwing it in the fire. As before, he went to his pack in the shed, taking the candle with him—the errand appeared to be really most trivial—and stayed so long that the little Jutts, who now loved him very much (as I could see), wished

that the need would not arise again. But, all in good time, he returned, and sat to watch for the reply, intent as any of them; and, presently, he snatched the stove door open, creating great confusion in the act, as before; and before the little Jutts could recover from the sudden surprise, he held up a smoking letter. Then he read aloud:

"Try Hamilton Inlet. Touches there 10:48. Time of arrival at Topmast Tickle uncertain. No use waiting up. SNOW, Clerk."

"By Jove!" exclaimed the doctor. "That's jolly! Touches Hamilton Inlet at 10:48." He consulted his watch. "It's now 10:43 and a half. We've just four and a half minutes. I'll get a message off at once. Where's that confounded pen? Ha! Here we are. Now—what is it you want for Sammy and mama?"

The three little Jutts were suddenly thrown into a fearful state of excitement. They tried to talk all at once; but not one of them could frame a coherent sentence. It was most distressful to see.

"The Exterminator!" Martha managed to jerk out, at last.

"Oh, ay!" cried Jimmie Jutt. "Quick, zur! Write un down. Pine's Prompt Pain Exterminator. Warranted to cure. Please, zur, make haste!"

The doctor stared at Jimmie.

"Oh, zur," groaned Martha, "don't be starin' like that! Write, zur! 'Twas all in the paper the prospector left last summer. Pine's Prompt Pain Exterminator. Cures boils, rheumatism, pains in the back an' chest, sore throat, an' all they things, an' warts on the hands by a simple application with brown paper. We wants it for the rheumatiz, zur. Oh, zur——"

"None genuine without the label," Jimmie put in, in an excited rattle. "Money refunded if no cure. Get a bottle with the label."

The doctor laughed—laughed aloud, and laughed again. "By Jove!" he roared, "you'll get it. It's odd, but—ha, ha!—by Jove, he has it in stock!"

The laughter and repeated assurance seemed vastly to encourage Jimmie and Martha—the doctor wrote like mad while he talked—but not little Sammy. All that he lisped, all that he shouted, all that he screamed, had gone unheeded. As though unable to put up with the neglect any longer, he limped over the floor to Martha, and tugged her sleeve, and pulled at Jimmie's coat-tail, and jogged the doctor's arm, until, at last, he attracted a measure of attention. Notwithstanding his mother's protests —notwithstanding her giggles and waving hands— notwithstanding that she blushed as red as ink (until, as I perceived, her freckles were all lost to sight)—

notwithstanding that she threw her apron over her head and rushed headlong from the room, to the imminent danger of the door-posts—little Sammy insisted that his mother's gift should be named in the letter of request.

"Quick!" cried the doctor. "What is it? We've but half a minute left."

Sammy began to stutter.

"Make haste, b'y!" cried Jimmie.

"One — bottle — of — the — Magic — Egyptian— Beautifier," said Sammy, quite distinctly for the first time in his life.

The doctor looked blank; but he doggedly nodded his head, nevertheless, and wrote it down; and oft went the letter at precisely 10 : 47.45, as the doctor said.

Later—when the excitement had all subsided and we sat dreaming in the warmth and glow —the doctor took little Sammy in his lap, and told him he was a very good boy, and looked deep in his eyes, and stroked his hair, and, at last, very tenderly bared his knee. Sammy flinched at that; and he said "Ouch!" once, and screwed up his face, when the doctor—his gruffness all gone, his eyes gentle and sad, his hand as light as a mother's —worked the joint, and felt the knee-cap and socket with the tips of his fingers.

"And is this the rheumatiz the Prompt Exterminator is to cure, Sammy?" he asked.

"Ith, zur."

"Ah, is *that* where it hurts you? Right on the point of the bone, there?"

"Ith, zur."

"And was there no fall on the rock, at all? Oh, there *was* a fall? And the bruise was just there—where it hurts so much? And it's very hard to bear, isn't it?"

Sammy shook his head.

"No? But it hurts a good deal, sometimes, does it not? That's too bad. That's very sad, indeed. But, perhaps—perhaps, Sammy—I can cure it for you, if you are brave. And are you brave? No? Oh, I think you are. And you'll try to be, at any rate, won't you? Of course! That's a good boy."

And so, with his sharp little knives, the doctor cured Sammy Jutt's knee, while the lad lay white and still on the kitchen table. And 'twas not hard to do; but had not the doctor chanced that way, Sammy Jutt would have been a cripple all his life.

"Doctor, zur," said Matilda Jutt, when the children were put to bed, with Martha to watch by Sammy, who was still very sick, "is you really got a bottle o' Pine's Prompt?"

The doctor laughed. "An empty bottle," said he. "I picked it up at Poverty Cove. Thought it might come useful. I'll put Sammy's medicine in that. They'll not know the difference. And you'll treat the knee with it as I've told you. That's all. We must turn in at once; for we must be gone before the children wake in the morning."

"Oh, ay, zur; an'——" she began: but hesitated, much embarrassed.

"Well?" the doctor asked, with a smile.

"Would you mind puttin' some queer lookin' stuff in one o' they bottles o' yours?"

"Not in the least," in surprise.

"An' writin' something on a bit o' paper," she went on, pulling at her apron, and looking down, "an' gluin' it t' the bottle?"

"Not at all. But what shall I write?"

She flushed. "'Magic Egyptian Beautifier,' zur," she answered; "for I'm thinkin' 'twould please little Sammy t' think that Sandy Claws left something—for me—too."

If you think that the three little Jutts found nothing but bottles of medicine in their stockings, when they got down-stairs on Christmas morning, you are very much mistaken. Indeed, there was much more than that—a great deal more than that. I will not

tell you what it was; for you might sniff, and say, "Huh! That's little enough!" But there *was* more than medicine. No man—rich man, poor man, beggarman nor thief, doctor, lawyer nor merchant chief—ever yet left a Hudson's Bay Company's post, stared in the face by the chance of having to seek hospitality of a Christmas Eve—no right-feeling man, I say, ever yet left a Hudson's Bay Company's post, under such circumstances, without putting something more than medicine in his pack. I chance to know, at any rate, that upon this occasion Doctor Luke did not. And I know, too—you may be interested to learn it—that as we floundered through the deep snow, homeward bound, soon after dawn, the next day, he was glad enough that he hadn't. No merry shouts came over the white miles from the cottage of Jonas Jutt, though I am sure that they rang there most heartily; but the doctor did not care: he shouted merrily enough for himself, for he was very happy. And that's the way *you'd* feel, too, if you spent *your* days hunting good deeds to do.

XXI

DOWN NORTH

WHEN, in my father's house, that night, the Christmas revel was over—when, last of all, in noisy glee, we had cleared the broad kitchen floor for Sir Roger De Coverly, which we danced with the help of the maids' two swains and Skipper Tommy Lovejoy and Jacky, who had come out from the Lodge for the occasion (all being done to the tune of "Money Musk," mercilessly wrung from an ancient accordion by Timmie Lovejoy)—when, after that, we had all gathered before the great blaze in the best room, we told no tales, such as we had planned to tell, but soon fell to staring at the fire, each dreaming his own dreams.

It may be that my thoughts changed with the dying blaze—passing from merry fancies to gray visions, trooping out of the recent weeks, of cold and hunger and squalid death in the places from which we had returned.

"Davy!" said my sister.

I started.

"What in the world," she asked, "is you thinkin' so dolefully of?"

"I been thinkin'," I answered, sighing, "o' the folk down narth."

"Of the man at Runner's Woe?" the doctor asked.

"No, zur. He on'y done murder. 'Twas not o' he. 'Twas o' something sadder than that."

"Then 'tis too sad to tell," he said.

"No," I insisted. "'Twould do well-fed folk good t' hear it."

"What was it?" my sister asked.

"I was thinkin' ——"

Ah, but '*twas* too sad!

"O' what?"

"O' the child at Comfort Harbour, Bessie, that starved in his mother's arms."

Timmie Lovejoy threw more billets on the fire. They flamed and spluttered and filled the room with cheerful light.

"Davy," said the doctor, "we can never cure the wretchedness of this coast."

"No, zur?"

"But we can try to mitigate it."

"We'll try," said I. "You an' me."

"You and I."

"And I," my sister said.

Lying between the sturdy little twins, that night—where by right of caste I lay, for it was the warmest place in the bed—I abandoned, once and for all, my old hope of sailing a schooner, with the decks awash.

"Timmie!" I whispered.

He was sound asleep. I gave him an impatient nudge in the ribs.

"Ay, Davy?" he asked.

"You may have my hundred-tonner," said I.

"What hundred-tonner?"

"The big fore-an'-after, Timmie, I'm t' have when I'm growed. You may skipper she. You'll not wreck her, Timmie, will you?"

He was asleep.

"Hut!" I thought, angrily. "I'll have Jacky skipper that craft, if Timmie don't look out."

At any rate, she was not to be for me.

XXII

The WAY From HEART'S DELIGHT

IT chanced in the spring of that year that my sister and the doctor and I came unfortuitously into a situation of grave peril: wherein (as you shall know) the doctor was precipitate in declaring a sentiment, which, it may be, he should still have kept close within his heart, withholding it until a happier day. But for this there is some excuse: for not one of us hoped ever again to behold the rocks and placid water of our harbour, to continue the day's work to the timely close of the day, to sit in quiet places, to dream a fruitful future, to aspire untroubled in security and ease: and surely a man, whatever his disposition and strength of mind, being all at once thus confronted, may without blame do that which, as a reward for noble endeavour, he had hoped in all honour to do in some far-off time.

Being bound across the bay from Heart's Delight of an ominously dull afternoon—this on a straight-away course over the ice which still clung to the

coast rocks—we were caught in a change of wind and swept to sea with the floe: a rising wind, blowing with unseasonable snow from the northwest, which was presently black as night. Far off shore, the pack was broken in pieces by the sea, scattered broadcast by the gale; so that by the time of deep night—while the snow still whipped past in clouds that stung and stifled us—our pan rode breaking water: which hissed and flashed on every hand, the while ravenously eating at our narrow raft of ice. Death waited at our feet. . . . We stood with our backs to the wind, my sister and I cowering, numb and silent, in the lee of the doctor. . . . Through the long night 'twas he that sheltered us. . . . By and by he drew my sister close. She sank against his breast, and trembled, and snuggled closer, and lay very still in his arms. . . . I heard his voice: but was careless of the words, which the wind swept overhead—far into the writhing night beyond.

"No, zur," my sister answered. "I'm not afraid—with you."

A long time after that, when the first light of dawn was abroad—sullen and cheerless—he spoke again.

"Zur?" my sister asked, trembling.

He whispered in her ear.

"Ay, zur," she answered.

Then he kissed her lips. . . .

Late in the day the snow-clouds passed. Ice and black water mercilessly encompassed us to the round horizon of gray sky. There was no hope anywhere to be descried. . . . In the dead of night a change of wind herded the scattered fragments of the pack. The ice closed in upon us—great pans, crashing together: threatening to crush our frailer one. . . . We were driven in a new direction. . . . Far off to leeward—somewhere deep in the black night ahead—the floe struck the coast. We heard the evil commotion of raftering ice. It swept towards us. Our pan stopped dead with a jolt. The pack behind came rushing upon us. We were tilted out of the water—lifted clear of it all—dropped headlong with the wreck of the pan. . . .

I crawled out of a shallow pool of water. "Bessie!" I screamed. "Oh, Bessie, where is you?"

The noise of the pack passed into distance—dwindling to deepest silence.

"Davy," my sister called, "is you hurt?"

"Where is you, Bessie?"

"Here, dear," she answered, softly. "The doctor has me safe."

Guided by her sweet voice, I crept to them; and

then we sat close together, silent all in the silent night, waiting for the dawn. . . .

We traversed a mile or more of rugged, blinding ice—the sky blue in every part, the sun shining warm, the wind blowing light and balmy from the south. What with the heat, the glare, the uneven, treacherous path—with many a pitfall to engulf us—'twas a toilsome way we travelled. The coast lay white and forsaken beyond—desolate, inhospitable, unfamiliar: an unkindly refuge for such castaways as we. But we came gratefully to the rocks, at last, and fell exhausted in the snow, there to die, as we thought, of hunger and sheer weariness. And presently the doctor rose, and, bidding us lie where we were, set out to discover our whereabouts, that he might by chance yet succour us: which seemed to me a hopeless venture, for the man was then near snow-blind, as I knew. . . .

Meantime, at our harbour, where the world went very well, the eye of Skipper Tommy Lovejoy chanced in aimless roving to alight upon the letter from Wolf Cove, still securely fastened to the wall, ever visible warning to that happy household against the wiles o' women. I fancy that (the twins being gone to Trader's Cove to enquire for us) the mild

blue eye wickedly twinkled—that it found the tender missive for the moment irresistible in fascination—that the old man approached, stepping in awe, and gazed with gnawing curiosity at the pale, sprawling superscription, his very name—that he touched the envelope with his thick forefinger, just to make sure that 'twas tight in its place, beyond all peradventure of catastrophe—that, merely to provide against its defilement by dust, he removed and fondled it—that then he wondered concerning its contents, until, despite his crying qualms of conscience (the twins being gone to Trader's Cove and Davy Roth off to Heart's Delight to help the doctor heal the young son of Agatha Rundle), this fateful dreaming altogether got the better of him. At any rate, off he hied through the wind and snow to Tom Tot's cottage: where, as fortune had it, Tom Tot was mending a caplin seine.

"Tom Tot," said he, quite shamelessly, "I'm fair achin' t' know what's in this letter."

The harbour was cognizant of Skipper Tommy's state and standing temptation: much concerned, as well, as to the outcome.

"Skipper Tommy," Tom Tot asked, and that most properly, "is you got leave o' the boss's son?"

"Davy?"

"Ay, Davy."

"I is not," the skipper admitted, with becoming candour.

"Is you spoke t' the twins?"

"I is not."

"Then," Tom Tot concluded, "shame on you!"

Skipper Tommy tweaked his nose. "Tom Tot," said he, "you got a wonderful power for readin'. Don't you go tellin' *me* you hasn't! I *knows* you has."

"Well," Tom Tot admitted, "as you're makin' a p'int of it, I'm fair on print, but poor on writin'."

"Tom Tot," Skipper Tommy went on, with a wave (I fancy) of uttermost admiration, "I'll stand by it that you is as good at writin' as print. That I will," he added, recklessly, "agin the world."

Tom Tot yielded somewhat to this blandishment. He took the proffered letter. "I isn't denyin', Skipper Tommy," he said, "that I'm able t' make out your name on this here letter."

"Ecod!" cried Skipper Tommy, throwing up his hands. "I knowed it!"

"I isn't denyin'," Tom Tot repeated, gravely, "that I'm *fair* on writin'. Fair, mark you! No more."

"Ay," said the skipper, "but I'm wantin' you t' know that this here letter was writ by a woman with a wonderful sight o' l'arnin'. I'll warrant you can

read *it.* O' course," in a large, conclusive way, "an you *can't* ——"

"Skipper Tommy," Tom interrupted, quickly, "I isn't *sayin'* I can't."

"Isn't you?" innocently. "Why, Tom Tot, I was thinkin' ——"

"No, zur!" Tom answered with heat. "I isn't!"

"Well, you wouldn't ——"

"I will!"

"So be," said the skipper, with a sigh of infinite satisfaction. "I'm thinkin', somehow," he added, his sweet faith now beautifully radiant (I am sure), as was his way, "that the Lard is mixed up in this letter. He's mixed up in 'most all that goes on, an' I'd not be s'prised if He had a finger in this. 'Now,' says the Lard, 'Skipper Tommy,' says He, 'the mail-boat went t' the trouble o' leavin' you a letter,' says He, 'an'——'"

"Leave the Lard out o' this," Tom Tot broke in.

"Sure, an' why?" Skipper Tom mildly asked.

"You've no call t' drag Un in here," was the sour reply. "You leave Un alone. You're gettin' too wonderful free an' easy with the Lard God A'mighty, Thomas Lovejoy. He'll be strikin' you dead in your tracks an you don't look out."

"Tom Tot," the skipper began, "the Lard an' me is wonderful ——"

"Leave the Lard alone," Tom Tot snapped. "Come, now! Is you wantin' this here letter read?"

"I is."

Without more ado, Tom Tot opened the letter from Wolf Cove. I have no doubt that sensitive blood flushed the bronzed, wrinkled cheeks of Skipper Tommy Lovejoy, and that, in a burst of grinning modesty, he tweaked his nose with small regard for that sorely tried and patient member. And I am informed that, while my old friend thus waited in ecstasy, Tom Tot puzzled over the letter, for a time, to make sure that his learning would not be discomfited in the presence of Skipper Tommy Lovejoy, before whom he had boasted. Then ——

"Skipper Tommy," he implored, in agony, "how long—oh, how long—is you had this letter?"

Skipper Tommy stared.

"How long, oh, how long?" Tom Tot repeated.

"What's gone amiss?" Skipper Tommy entreated, touching Tom Tot's shaking hand. "It come in the fall o' the year, Tom, lad. But what's gone amiss along o' you?"

"She've been waitin'—since then? Oh, a wretched father, I!"

"Tom, lad, tell me what 'tis all about."

"'Tis from she—Mary! 'Tis from my lass," Tom

Tot cried. "'Twas writ by that doctor-woman—an' sent t' you, Skipper Tommy—t' tell me—t' break it easy—that she'd run off from Wayfarer's Tickle—because o' the sin she'd found there. I misdoubt—oh, I misdoubt—that she've been afeared I'd—that I'd mistook her, poor wee thing—an' turn her off. I call the Lard God A'mighty t' witness," he cried, passionately, "that I'd take her home, whatever come t' pass! I calls God t' witness that I loves my lass! She've done no wrong," he continued. "She've but run away from the sin t' Wayfarer's Tickle. She've taken shelter t' Wolf Cove—because—she've been afeared that—I'd mistook—an' cast her off!"

"An' she's waitin' there for you?"

"Ay—for me—t' bring her home."

"For her father t' come?"

"Her father."

There was a moment of silence. "Tom Tot," Skipper Tommy declared, fetching his thigh a resounding slap, "that letter's been tacked t' my wall the winter long. Is you hearin' me, Tom Tot? It's been lyin' idle agin my wall. While she've been waitin', Tom! While she've been waitin'!"

"Oh, ay!"

"I'm fair glad you're hearin' me," said the skipper. "For I calls you t' witness this: that when I cotches

them twins o' mine I'll thwack un till they're red, Tom Tot—till they're red and blistered below decks. An' when I cotches that young Davy Roth—when I cotches un alone, 'ithout the doctor—I'll give un double watches."

"We'll get underway for Wolf Cove, Skipper Tommy," said Tom Tot, "when the weather lightens. An' we'll fetch that lass o' mine," he added, softly, "home."

"That we will, Tom Tot," said Skipper Tommy Lovejoy.

And 'twas thus it came about that we were rescued: for, being old and wise, they chose to foot it to Wolf Cove—over the 'longshore hills—fearing to chance the punt at sea, because of the shifting ice. Midway between our harbour and Wolf Cove, they found the doctor sitting blind in the snow, but still lustily entreating the surrounding desolation for help—raising a shout at intervals, in the manner of a faithful fog-horn. Searching in haste and great distress, they soon came upon my sister and me, exhausted, to be sure, and that most pitiably, but not beyond the point of being heartily glad of their arrival. Then they made a tiny fire with birch rind and billets from Tom Tot's pack—and the fire crackled and blazed in a fashion the most heartening —and the smutty tin kettle bubbled as busily as in

the most immaculate of kitchens: and presently the tea and hard-bread were doing such service as rarely, indeed, save in our land, it is their good fortune to achieve. And having been refreshed and roundly scolded, we were led to the cove beyond, where we lay the night at the cottage of Tiltworthy Cutch: whence, in the morning, being by that time sufficiently restored, we set out for our harbour, under the guidance of Skipper Tommy Lovejoy, whose continued separation from the woman at Wolf Cove I made sure of by commanding his presence with us.

"You may beat me, Skipper Tommy," said I, "when you gets me home, an' I wish you joy of it. But home you goes!"

"But, Davy, lad," he protested, "there's that poor Tom Tot goin' on alone——"

"Home you goes!"

"An' there's that kind-hearted doctor-woman. Sure, now, Davy," he began, sweetly, "I'd like t' tell she——"

"That's just," said I, "what I'm afeared of."

Home the skipper came; and when the twins and I subsequently presented ourselves for chastisement, with solemn ceremony, gravely removing whatever was deemed in our harbour superfluous under the circumstances, he was so affected by the spectacle that

(though I wish I might write it differently) he declared himself of opinion, fixed and unprejudiced, that of all the works of the Lord, which were many and infinitely blessed, none so favoured the gracious world as the three contrite urchins there present: and in this ecstasy of tenderness (to our shame) quite forgot the object of our appearance.

When Tom Tot brought Mary home from Wolf Cove, my sister and the doctor and I went that night by my sister's wish to distinguish the welcome, so that, in all our harbour, there might be no quibble or continuing suspicion; and we found the maid cutting her father's hair in the kitchen (for she was a clever hand with the scissors and comb), as though nothing had occurred—Skipper Tommy Lovejoy meanwhile with spirit engaging the old man in a discussion of the unfailing topic; this being the attitude of the Lord God Almighty towards the wretched sons of men, whether feeling or not.

In the confusion of our entrance Mary whispered in my ear. "Davy lad," she said, with an air of mystery, "I got home."

"I'm glad, Mary," I answered, "that you got home."

"An', hist!" said she, "I got something t' tell you," said she, her eyes flashing, "along about hell."

"Is you?" I asked, in fear, wishing she had not.

She nodded.

"Is you *got* t' tell me, Mary?"

"Davy," she whispered, pursing her lips, in the pause regarding me with a glance so significant of darkest mystery that against my very will I itched to share the fearful secret, "I got t'."

"Oh, why?" I still protested.

"I been there!" said she.

'Twas quite enough to entice me beyond my power: after that, I kept watch, all in a shiver of dread, for some signal; and when she had swept her father's shorn hair from the floor, and when my sister had gone with Tom Tot's wife to put the swarm of little Tots to bed, and when Tom Tot had entered upon a minute description of the sin at Wayfarer's Tickle, from which his daughter, fearing sudden death and damnation, had fled, Mary beckoned me to follow: which I did. Without, in the breathless, moonlit night, I found her waiting in a shadow; and she caught me by the wrist, clutching it cruelly, and led me to the deeper shadow and seclusion of a great rock, rising from the path to the flake. 'Twas very still and awesome, there in the dark of that black rock, with the light of the moon lying ghostly white on all the barren world, and the long, low howl of some forsaken dog from time to time disturbing the solemn silence.

I was afraid.

"Davy, lad," she whispered, bending close, so that she could look into my eyes, which wavered, "is you listenin'?"

"Ay," I answered, breathless.

Her voice was then triumphant. "I been t' hell," said she, "an' back!"

"What's it like, Mary?"

She shuddered.

"What's it like," I pleaded, lusting for the unholy knowledge, "in hell?"

For a moment she stared at the moonlit hills. Her grasp on my wrist relaxed. I saw that her lips were working.

"What's it like," I urged, "in hell?" for I devoutly wished to have the disclosure over with.

"'Tis hell," she answered, low, "at Wayfarer's Tickle. The gate t' hell! Rum an' love, Davy, dear," she added, laying a fond hand upon my head, "leads t' hell."

"Not love!" I cried, in sudden fear: for I had thought of the driving snow, of my dear sister lying in the doctor's arms, of his kiss upon her lips. "Oh, love leads t' heaven!"

"T' hell," said she.

"No, no!"

"T' hell."

I suffered much in the silence—while, together, Mary and I stared at the silent world, lying asleep in the pale light.

"'Twas rum," she resumed, "that sent the crew o' the *Right an' Tight* t' hell. An' 'twas a merry time they had at the gate. Ay, a merry time, with Jagger fillin' the cups an' chalkin' it down agin the fish! But they went t' hell. *They went t' hell!* She was lost with all hands in the gale o' that week—lost on the Devil's Fingers—an' all hands drunk! An' Jack Ruddy o' Helpful Harbour," she muttered, "went down along o' she. He was a bonnie lad," she added, tenderly, "an' he kissed me by stealth in the kitchen." Very sorrowfully she dreamed of that boisterous kiss. "But," she concluded, "'twas love that put Eliza Hare in th' etarnal fires."

"Not love!" I complained.

"Davy," she said, not deigning to answer me, "Davy," she repeated, her voice again rising splendidly triumphant, "I isn't goin' t' hell! For I've looked in an' got away. The Lard 'll never send me, now. Never!"

"I'm glad, Mary."

"I'm not a goat," she boasted. "'Twas all a mistake. I'm a sheep. That's what *I* is!"

"I'm wonderful glad."

"But you, Davy," she warned, putting an arm

about my waist, in sincere affection, "you better look out."

"I isn't afeared."

"You better look out!"

"Oh, Mary," I faltered, "I—I—isn't *much* afeared."

"You better look out!"

"Leave us go home!" I begged.

"The Lard 'll ship you there an you don't look out. He've no mercy on little lads."

"Oh, leave us go home!"

"He'll be cotchin' you!"

I could bear it no longer: nor wished to know any more about hell. I took her hand, and dragged her from the black shadow of the rock: crying out that we must now go home. Then we went back to Tom Tot's cheerful kitchen; and there I no longer feared hell, but could not forget, try as I would, what Mary Tot had told me about love.

Skipper Tommy Lovejoy was preaching what the doctor called in his genial way "The Gospel According to Tommy."

"Sure, now, Tom Tot," said he, "the Lard is a Skipper o' wonderful civil disposition. 'Skipper Tommy,' says He t' me, 'an you only does the best——'"

"You're too free with the name o' the Lard."

Skipper Tommy looked up in unfeigned surprise. "Oh, no, Tom," said he, mildly, "I isn't. The Lard an' me is ——"

"You're too free," Tom Tot persisted. "Leave Un be or you'll rue it."

"Oh, no, Tom," said the skipper. "The Lard an' me gets along wonderful well together. We're *wonderful* good friends. I isn't scared o' *He!*"

As we walked home, that night, the doctor told my sister and me that, whatever the greater world might think of the sin at Wayfarer's Tickle, whether innocuous or virulent, Jagger was beyond cavil flagrantly corrupting our poor folk, who were simple-hearted and easy to persuade: that he was, indeed, a nuisance which must be abated, come what would.

XXIII

The COURSE of TRUE LOVE

SYMPTOMS of my dear sister's previous disorder now again alarmingly developed—sighs and downcast glances, quick flushes, infinite tenderness to us all, flashes of high spirits, wet lashes, tumultuously beating heart; and there were long dreams in the twilight, wherein, when she thought herself alone, her sweet face was at times transfigured into some holy semblance. And perceiving these unhappy evidences, I was once more disquieted; and I said that I must seek the doctor's aid, that she might be cured of the perplexing malady: though, to be sure, as then and there I impatiently observed, the doctor seemed himself in some strange way to have contracted it, and was doubtless quite incapable of prescribing.

My sister would not brook this interference. "I'm not sayin'," she added, "that the doctor couldn't cure me, an he had a mind to; for, Davy, dear," with an earnest wag of her little head, "'twould not be the truth. I'm only sayin' that I'll not have un try it."

"Sure, why, Bessie?"

Her glance fell. "I'll not tell you why," said she.

"But I'm wantin' t' know."

She pursed her lips.

"Is you forgettin'," I demanded, "that I'm your brother?"

"No," she faltered.

"Then," said I, roughly, "I'll have the doctor cure you whether you will or not!"

She took my hand, and for a moment softly stroked it, looking away. "You're much changed, dear," she said, "since our mother died."

"Oh, Bessie!"

"Ay," she sighed.

I hung my head. 'Twas a familiar bitterness. I was, indeed, not the same as I had been. And it seems to me, now—even at this distant day—that this great loss works sad changes in us every one. Whether we be child or man, we are none of us the same, afterwards.

"Davy," my sister pleaded, "were your poor sister now t' ask you t' say no word——"

"I would not say one word!" I broke in. "Oh, I would not!"

That was the end of it.

Next day the doctor bade me walk with him on the Watchman, so that, as he said, he might without

interruption speak a word with me: which I was loath to do; for he had pulled a long face of late, and had sighed and stared more than was good for our spirits, nor smiled at all, save in a way of the wryest, and was now so grave—nay, sunk deep in blear-eyed melancholy—that 'twas plain no happiness lay in prospect. 'Twas sad weather, too—cold fog in the air, the light drear, the land all wet and black, the sea swishing petulantly in the mist. I had no mind to climb the Watchman, but did, cheerily as I could, because he wished it, as was my habit.

When we got to Beacon Rock, there was no flush of red in the doctor's cheeks, as ever there had been, no life in his voice, which not long since had been buoyant; and his hand, while for a moment it rested affectionately on my shoulder, shook in a way that frightened me.

"Leave us go back!" I begged. "I'm not wantin' t' talk."

I wished I had not come: for there was in all this some foreboding of wretchedness. I was very much afraid.

"I have brought you here, Davy," he began, with grim deliberation, "to tell you something about myself. I do not find it," with a shrug and a wry mouth, "a pleasant ——"

"Come, zur," I broke in, this not at all to my liking, "leave us go t' the Soldier's Ear!"

"Not an agreeable duty," he pursued, fixing me with dull eyes, "for me to speak; nor will it be, I fancy, for you to hear. But——"

This exceeded even my utmost fears. "I dare you, zur," said I, desperate for a way of escape, "t' dive from Nestin' Ledge this cold day!"

He smiled—but 'twas half a sad frown; for at once he puckered his forehead.

"You're scared!" I taunted.

He shook his head.

"Oh, do come, zur!"

"No, Davy," said he.

I sighed.

"For," he added, sighing, too, "I have something to tell you, which must now be told."

Whatever it was—however much he wished it said and over with—he was in no haste to begin. While, for a long time, I kicked at the rock, in anxious expectation, he sat with his hands clasped over his knee, staring deep into the drear mist at sea—beyond the breakers, past the stretch of black and restless water, far, far into the gray spaces, which held God knows what changing visions for him! I stole glances at him—not many, for then I cared not, lest I cry; and I fancied that his disconsolate musings must

be of London, a great city, which, as he had told me many times, lay infinitely far away in that direction.

"Well, Davy, old man," he said, at last, with a quick little laugh, "hit or miss, here goes!"

"You been thinkin' o' London," I ventured, hoping, if might be, for a moment longer to distract him.

"But not with longing," he answered, quickly. "I left no one to wish me back. Not one heart to want me—not one to wait for me! And I do not wish myself back. I was a dissipated fellow there, and when I turned my back on that old life, when I set out to find a place where I might atone for those old sins, 'twas without regret, and 'twas for good and all. This," he said, rising, "is my land. This," he repeated, glancing north and south over the dripping coast, the while stretching wide his arms, "is now my land! I love it for the opportunity it gave me. I love it for the new man it has made me. I have forgotten the city. I love *this* life! And I love you, Davy," he cried, clapping his arm around me, "and I love——"

He stopped.

"I knows, zur," said I, in an awed whisper, "whom you love."

"Bessie," said he.

"Ay, Bessie."

There was now no turning away. My recent fears had been realized. I must tell him what was in my heart.

"Mary Tot says, zur," I gasped, "that love leads t' hell."

He started from me.

"I would not have my sister," I continued, "go t' hell. For, zur," said I, "she'd be wonderful lonesome there."

"To hell?" he asked, hoarsely.

"Oh, ay!" I groaned. "T' the flames o' hell!"

"'Tis not true!" he burst out, with a radiant smile. "I know it! Love—my love for her—has led me nearer heaven than ever I hoped to be!"

I troubled no more. Here was a holy passion. Child that I was—ignorant of love and knowing little enough of evil—I still perceived that this love was surely of the good God Himself. I feared no more for my dear sister. She would be safe with him.

"You may love my sister," said I, "an you want to. You may have her."

He frowned in a troubled way.

"Ay," I repeated, convinced, "you may have my dear sister. I'm not afraid."

"Davy," he said, now so grave that my heart jumped, "you give her to the man I am."

"I'm not carin'," I replied, "what you was."

"You do not know."

Apprehension grappled with me. "I'm not wantin' t' know," I protested. "Come, zur," I pleaded, "leave us go home."

"Once, Davy," he said, "I told you that I had been wicked."

"You're not wicked now."

"I was."

"I'm not carin' what you was. Oh, zur," I cried, tugging at his hand, "leave us go home!"

"And," said he, "a moment ago I told you that I had been a dissipated fellow. Do you know what that means?"

"I'm not *wantin'* t' know!"

"You must know."

I saw the peril of it all. "Oh, tell me not!" I begged. "Leave us go home!"

"But I *must* tell you, Davy," said he, beginning, now in an agony of distress, to pace the hilltop. "It is not a matter of to-day. You are only a lad, now; but you will grow up—and learn—and know. Oh, God," he whispered, looking up to the frowning sky, laying, the while, his hand upon my head, "if only we could continue like this child! If only we *need* not know! I want you, Davy," he continued, once more addressing me, "when you grow up, to

know, to recall, whatever happens, that I was fair, fair to you and fair to her, whom you love. You are not like other lads. It is your *place*, I think, in this little community, that makes you different. *You* can understand. I *must* tell you."

"I'm scared t' know," I gasped. "Take my sister, zur, an' say no more."

"Scared to know? And I to tell. But for your sister's sake—for the sake of her happiness—I'll tell you, Davy—let me put my arm around you—ay, I'll tell you, lad, God help me! what it means to be a dissipated fellow. O Christ," he sighed, "I pay for all I did! Merciful God, at this moment I pay the utmost price! Davy, lad," drawing me closer, "you will not judge me harshly?"

"I'll hearken," I answered, hardening.

Then, frankly, he told me as much, I fancy, as a man may tell a lad of such things. . . .

In horror—in shame—ay, in shame so deep I flushed and dared not look at him—I flung off his arms. And I sprang away—desperately fingering my collar: for it seemed I must choke, so was my throat filled with indignation. "You wicked man!" I cried. "You kissed my sister. You—*you*—kissed my sister!"

"Davy!"

"You wicked, wicked man!"

"Don't, Davy!"

"Go 'way!" I screamed.

Rather, he came towards me, opening his arms, beseeching me. But I was hot-headed and willful, being only a lad, without knowledge of sin gained by sinning, and, therefore, having no compassion; and, still, I fell away from him, but he followed, continuing to beseech me, until, at last, I struck him on the breast: whereupon, he winced, and turned away. Then, in a flash—in the still, illuminating instant that follows a blow struck in blind rage—I was appalled by what I had done; and I stood stiff, my hands yet clinched, a storm of sobs on the point of breaking: hating him and myself and all the world, because of the wrong he had done us, and the wrong I had done him, and the wrong that life had worked us all.

I took to my heels.

"Davy!" he called.

The more he cried after me, the more beseechingly his voice rang in my ears, the more my heart urged me to return—the harder I ran.

I wish I had not struck him . . . I wish, I say, I had not struck him . . . I wish that when he came towards me, with his arms wide open, his

grave, gray eyes pleading—wretched soul that he was—I wish that then I had let him enfold me. What poor cleverness, what a poor sacrifice, it would have been! 'Twas I—strange it may have been—but still 'twas I, Davy Roth, a child, Labrador born and bred, to whom he stretched out his hand. I should have blessed God that to this remote place a needful man had come. 'Twas my great moment of opportunity. I might—I might—have helped him. How rare the chance! And to a child! I might have taken his hand. I might have led him immediately into placid waters. But I was I—unfeeling, like all lads: blind, too, reprehensible, deserving of blame. In all my life—and, as it happens (of no merit of my own, but of his), it has thus far been spent seeking to give help and comfort to such as need it—never, never, in the diligent course of it, has an opportunity so momentous occurred. I wish—oh, I wish—he might once again need me! To lads—and to men—and to frivolous maids—and to beggars and babies and cripples and evil persons—and to all sorts and conditions of human kind! Who knows to whom the stricken soul—downcast whether of sin or sorrow—may appeal? Herein is justification—the very key to heaven, with which one may unlock the door and enter, claiming bliss by right, defiant of God Himself, if need were: "I have sinned, in common with

all men, O God, but I have sought to help such as were in sorrow, whether of sin or the misfortunes incident to life in the pit below, which is the world. You dare not cast me out!" Oh, men and women, lads and maids, I speak because of the wretchedness of my dear folk, out of their sorrow, which is common to us all, but here, in this barren place, is unrelieved, not hidden. Take the hand stretched out! And watch: lest in the great confusion this hand appear—and disappear. If there be sin, here it is: that the hand wavered, beseeching, within reach of such as were on solid ground, and was not grasped.

Ah, well! to my sister I ran; and I found her placidly sewing in the broad window of our house, which now looked out upon a melancholy prospect of fog and black water and vague gray hills. Perceiving my distress, she took me in her lap, big boy though I was, and rocked me, hushing me, the while, until I should command my grief and disclose the cause of it.

"He's a sinful man," I sobbed, at last. "Oh, dear Bessie, care no more for him!"

She stopped rocking—and pressed me closer to her soft, sweet bosom—so close that she hurt me, as my loving mother used to do. And when I looked up—when, taking courage, I looked into her face—I found

it fearsomely white and hopeless; and when, overcome by this, I took her hand, I found it very cold.

"Not sinful," she whispered, drawing my cheek close to hers. "Oh, not that!"

"A sinful, wicked person," I repeated, "not fit t' speak t' such as you."

"What have he done, Davy?"

"I'd shame t' tell you."

"Oh, what?"

"I may not tell. Hug me closer, Bessie, dear. I'm in woeful want o' love."

She rocked me, then—smoothing my cheek—kissing me—hoping thus to still my grief. A long, long time she coddled me, as my mother might have done.

"Not sinful," she said.

"Ay, a wicked fellow. We must turn un out o' here, Bessie. He've no place here, no more. He've sinned."

She kissed me on the lips. Her arms tightened about me. And there we sat—I in my sister's arms—hopeless in the drear light of that day.

"I love him," she said.

"Love him no more! Bessie, dear, he've sinned past all forgiving."

Again—and now abruptly—she stopped rocking. She sat me back in her lap. I could not evade her

glance—sweet-souled, confident, content, reflecting the bright light of heaven itself.

"There's no sin, Davy," she solemnly said, "that a woman can't forgive."

I passed that afternoon alone on the hills—the fog thickening, the wind blowing wet and cold, the whole world cast down—myself seeking, all the while, some reasonable way of return to the doctor's dear friendship. I did not know—but now I know—that reason, sour and implacable, is sadly inadequate to our need when the case is sore, and, indeed, a wretched staff, at best: but that fine impulse, the sure, inner feeling, which is faith, is ever the more trustworthy, if good is to be achieved, for it is forever sanguine, nor, in all the course of life, relentless. But, happily, Skipper Tommy Lovejoy, who, in my childhood, came often opportunely to guide me with his wiser, strangely accurate philosophy, now sought me on the hill, being informed, as it appeared, of my distress—and because, God be thanked! he loved me.

"Go 'way!" I complained.

"Go 'way?" cried he, indignantly. "I'll not go 'way. For shame! To send me from you!"

"I'm wantin' t' be alone."

"Ay; but 'tis unhealthy for you."

"I'm thrivin' well enough."

"Hut!" said he. "What's this atween the doctor an' you? You'd cast un off because he've sinned? Ecod! I've seldom heard the like. Who is you? Even the Lard God A'mighty wouldn't do that. Sure, *He* loves only such as have sinned. Lad," he went on, now, with a smile, with a touch of his rough old hand, compelling my confidence and affection, "what's past is done with. Isn't you l'arned that yet? Old sins are as if they never had been. Else what hope is there for us poor sons of men? The weight o' sin would sink us. 'Tis not the dear Lard's way t' deal so with men. To-day is not yesterday. What was, has been; it is not. A man is not what he was—he is what he is. But yet, lad—an' 'tis wonderful queer—to-day *is* yesterday. 'Tis *made* by yesterday. The mistake—the sin—o' yesterday is the straight course—the righteous deed—o' to-day. 'Tis only out o' sin that sweetness is born. That's just what sin is for! The righteous, Davy, dear," he said, in all sincerity, "are not lovable, not trustworthy. The devil nets un by the hundred quintal, for '*tis* such easy fishin'; but sinners—such as sin agin their will—the Lard loves an' gathers in. They who sin must suffer, Davy, an' only such as suffer can *know* the dear Lard's love. God be thanked for sin," he said, looking up, inspired. "Let

the righteous be damned—they deserve it. Give *me* the company o' sinners!"

"Is you sure?" I asked, confounded by this strange doctrine.

"I thank God," he answered, composedly, "that *I* have sinned—and suffered."

"Sure," said I, "*you* ought t' know, for you've lived so awful long."

"They's nothin' like sin," said he, with a sure smack of the lips, "t' make good men. I knows it."

"An' Bessie?"

"Oh, Davy, lad, *she'll* be safe with him!"

Then I, too, knew it—knew that sin had been beneficently decreed by God, whose wisdom seems so all-wise, once our perverse hearts are opened to perceive—knew that my dear sister would, indeed, be safe with this sinner, who sorrowed, also. And I was ashamed that I had ever doubted it.

"Look!" Skipper Tommy whispered.

Far off—across the harbour—near lost in the mist—I saw my sister and the doctor walking together.

My sister was waiting for me. "Davy," she asked, anxiously, "where have you been?"

"On the hills," I answered.

For a moment she was silent, fingering her apron;

and then, looking fearlessly into my eyes—"I love him," she said.

"I'm glad."

"I cannot help it," she continued, clasping her hands, her breast heaving. "I love him—so *hard*—I cannot tell it."

"I'm glad."

"An' he loves me. He loves me! I'm not doubtin' that. He *loves* me," she whispered, that holy light once more breaking about her, in which she seemed transfigured. "Oh," she sighed, beyond expression, "he loves me!"

"I'm glad."

"An' I'm content t' know it—just t' know that he loves me—just t' know that I love him. His hands and eyes and arms! I ask no more—but just t' know it. Just once to have—to have had him—kiss me. Just once to have lain in his arms, where, forever, I would lie. Oh, I'm glad," she cried, joyously, "that the good Lord made me! I'm glad—just for that. Just because he kissed me—just because I love him, who loves me. I'm glad I was made for him to love. 'Tis quite enough for me. I want—only this I want—that he may have me—that, body and soul, I may satisfy his love—so much I love him. Davy," she faltered, putting her hands to her eyes, "I love—I *love*—I love him!"

Ecod! 'Twas too much for me. Half scandalized, I ran away, leaving her weeping in my dear mother's rocking-chair.

My sister and I were alone at table that evening. The doctor was gone in the punt to Jolly Harbour, the maids said; but why, they did not know, for he had not told them—nor could we guess: for 'twas a vexatious distance, wind and tide what they were, nor would a wise man undertake it, save in case of dire need, which did not then exist, the folk of Jolly Harbour, as everybody knows, being incorruptibly healthy. But I would not go to sleep that night until my peace was made; and though, to deceive my sister, I went to bed, I kept my eyes wide open, waiting for the doctor's step on the walk and on the stair: a slow, hopeless footfall, when, late in the night, I heard it.

I followed him to his room—with much contrite pleading on the tip of my tongue. And I knocked timidly on the door.

"Come in, Davy," said he.

My heart was swelling so—my tongue so sadly unmanageable—that I could do nothing but whimper. But ——

"I'm wonderful sad, zur," I began, after a time, "t' think that I ——"

"Hush!" said he.

'Twas all I said—not for lack of will or words, but for lack of breath and opportunity; because all at once (and 'twas amazingly sudden) I found myself caught off my feet, and so closely, so carelessly, embraced, that I thought I should then and there be smothered: a death which, as I had been led to believe, my dear sister might have envied me, but was not at all to my liking. And when I got my breath 'twas but to waste it in bawling. But never had I bawled to such good purpose: for every muffled howl and gasp brought me nearer to that state of serenity from which I had that day cast myself by harsh and willful conduct.

Then—and 'twas not hard to do—I offered my supreme propitiation: which was now no more a sacrifice, but, rather, a high delight.

"You may have my sister, zur," I sobbed.

He laughed a little—laughed an odd little laugh, the like of which I had never heard.

"You may have her," I repeated, somewhat impatiently. "Isn't you hearin' me? I *give* her to you."

"This is very kind," he said. "But ——"

"You're *wantin'* her, isn't you?" I demanded, fearing for the moment that he had meantime changed his mind.

"Yes," he drawled; "but ——"

"But what?"

"She'll not have me."

"Not have you!" I cried.

"No," said he.

At that moment I learned much wisdom concerning the mysterious ways of women.

XXIV

The BEGINNING of The END

FROM this sad tangle we were next morning extricated by news from the south ports of our coast—news so ill that sentimental tears and wishes were of a sudden forgot; being this: that the smallpox had come to Poor Luck Harbour and was there virulently raging. By noon of that day the doctor's sloop was underway with a fair wind, bound south in desperate haste: a man's heart beating glad aboard, that there might come a tragic solution of his life's entanglement. My sister and I, sitting together on the heads of Good Promise, high in the sunlight, with the sea spread blue and rippling below—we two, alone, with hands clasped—watched the little patch of sail flutter on its way—silently watched until it vanished in the mist.

"I'm not knowin'," my sister sighed, still staring out to sea, "what's beyond the mist."

"Nor I."

'Twas like a curtain, veiling some dread mystery, as an ancient tragedy—but new to us, who sat waiting: and far past our guessing.

"I wonder what we'll see, dear," she whispered, "when the mist lifts."

"'Tis some woeful thing."

She leaned forward, staring, breathing deep, seeking with the strange gift of women to foresee the event; but she sighed, at last, and gave it up.

"I'm not knowin'," she said.

We turned homeward; and thereafter—through the months of that summer—we were diligent in business: but with small success, for Jagger of Wayfarer's Tickle, seizing the poor advantage with great glee, now foully slandered and oppressed us.

Near midsummer our coast was mightily outraged by the sailings of the *Sink or Swim*, Jim Tall, master—Jagger's new schooner, trading our ports and the harbours of the Newfoundland French Shore, with a case of smallpox in the forecastle. We were all agog over it, bitterly angered, every one of us; and by day we kept watch from the heads to warn her off, and by night we saw to our guns, that we might instantly deal with her, should she so much as poke her prow into the waters of our harbour. Once, being on the Watchman with my father's glass, I fancied I sighted her, far off shore, beating up to Wayfarer's Tickle in the dusk: but could not make sure, for there was a haze abroad, and her cut was

not yet well known to us. Then we heard no more of her, until, by and by, the skipper of the *Huskie Dog*, bound north, left news that she was still at large to the south, and sang us a rousing song, which, he said, had been made by young Dannie Crew of Ragged Harbour, and was then vastly popular with the folk of the places below.

"Oh, *have* you seed the skipper o' the schooner *Sink or Swim?*
We'll use a rope what's long an' strong, when we cotches him.
He've a case o' smallpox for'ard,
An' we'll hang un, by the Lord!
For he've traded every fishin' port from Conch t' Harbour Rim.

"T' save the folk that dreads it,
We'll hang the man that spreads it.
They's lakes o' fire in hell t' sail for such as Skipper Jim!"

My sister, sweet maid! being then in failing health and spirits, I secretly took ship with the skipper of the *Bonnie Betsy Buttercup*, bound south with the first load of that season: this that I might surely fetch the doctor to my sister's help, who sorely needed cheer and healing, lest she die like a thirsty flower, as my heart told me. And I found the doctor busy with the plague at Bay Saint Billy, himself quartered aboard the *Greased Lightning*, a fore-and-after which he had chartered for the season: to whom I lied diligently and without shame concerning my sister's condition, and with such happy effect that we put to sea in the brewing of the great gale of that

year, with our topsail and tommy-dancer spread to a sousing breeze. But so evil a turn did the weather take—so thick and wild—that we were thrice near driven on a lee shore, and, in the end, were glad enough to take chance shelter behind Saul's Island, which lies close to the mainland near the Harbourless Shore. There we lay three days, with all anchors over the side, waiting in comfortable security for the gale to blow out; and 'twas at dusk of the third day that we were hailed from the coast rocks by that ill-starred young castaway of the name of Docks whose tale precipitated the final castastrophe in the life of Jagger of Wayfarer's Tickle.

He was only a lad, but, doubtless, rated a man; and he was now sadly woebegone—starved, shivering, bruised by the rocks and breaking water from which he had escaped. We got him into the cozy forecastle, clapped him on the back, put him in dry duds; and, then, "Come, now, lads!" cried Billy Lisson, the hearty skipper of the *Greased Lightning*, "don't you go sayin' a word 'til I brew you a cup o' tea. On the Harbourless Shore, says you? An' all hands lost? Don't you say a word. Not one!"

The castaway turned a ghastly face towards the skipper. "No," he whispered, in a gasp, "not one."

"Not you!" Skipper Billy rattled. "You keep

mum. Don't you so much as *mutter* 'til I melts that iceberg in your belly."

"No, sir."

Perchance to forestall some perverse attempt at loquacity, Skipper Billy lifted his voice in song—a large, rasping voice, little enough acquainted with melody, but expressing the worst of the rage of those days: being thus quite sufficient to the occasion.

"Oh, *have* you seed the skipper o' the schooner *Sink or Swim?*
We'll use a rope what's long an' strong, when we cotches him.
He've a case o' smallpox for'ard,
An' we'll hang un, by the Lord!
For he've traded every fishin' port from Conch t' Harbour Rim.

"T' save the folk that dreads it,
We'll *hang* the man that spreads it.
They's lakes o' fire in hell t' sail for such as Skipper Jim!"

"Skipper Billy, sir," said Docks, hoarsely, leaning into the light of the forecastle lamp, "does you say *hang?* Was they goin' t' hang Skipper Jim if they cotched him?"

"*Was* we?" asked Skipper Billy. "By God," he roared, "we *is!*"

"My God!" Docks whispered, staring deep into the skipper's eyes, "they was goin' t' hang the skipper!"

There was not so much as the drawing of a breath then to be heard in the forecastle of the *Greased Lightning*. Only the wind, blowing in the night—

and the water lapping at the prow—broke the silence.

"Skipper Billy, sir," said Docks, his voice breaking to a whimper, "was they goin' t' hang the crew? They wasn't, was they? Not goin' t' *hang* un?"

"Skipper t' cook, lad," Skipper Billy answered, the words prompt and sure. "Hang un by the neck 'til they was dead."

"My God!" Docks whined. "They was goin' t' hang the crew!"

"But we isn't cotched un yet."

"No," said the boy, vacantly. "Nor you never will."

The skipper hitched close to the table. "Lookee, lad," said he, leaning over until his face was close to the face of Docks, "was *you* ever aboard the *Sink or Swim?*"

"Ay, sir," Docks replied, at last, brushing his hair from his brow. "I was clerk aboard the *Sink or Swim* two days ago."

For a time Skipper Billy quietly regarded the lad —the while scratching his beard with a shaking hand.

"Clerk," Docks sighed, "two days ago."

"Oh, *was* you?" the skipper asked. "Well, well!" His lower jaw dropped. "An' would mind tellin' us," he continued, his voice now touched with passion, "what's *come* o' that damned craft?"

"She was lost on the Harbourless Shore, sir, with all hands—but me."

"Thank God for that!"

"Ay, thank God!"

Wereupon the doctor vaccinated Docks.

XXV

A CAPITAL CRIME

"YOU never set eyes on old Skipper Jim, did you, Skipper Billy?" Docks began, later, that night. "No? Well, he was a wonderful hard man. They says the devil was abroad the night of his bornin'; but I'm thinkin' that Jagger o' Wayfarer's Tickle had more t' do with the life he lived than ever the devil could manage. 'Twas Jagger that owned the *Sink or Swim;* 'twas he that laid the courses—ay, that laid this last one, too. Believe me, sir," now turning to Doctor Luke, who had uttered a sharp exclamation, "for I *knowed* Jagger, an' I *sailed* along o' Skipper Jim. 'Skipper Jim,' says I, when the trick we played was scurvy, 'this here ain't right.' 'Right?' says he. 'Jagger's gone an' laid *that* word by an' forgot where he put it.' 'But you, Skipper Jim,' says I, '*you;* what *you* doin' this here for?' 'Well, Docks,' says he, 'Jagger,' says he, 'says 'tis a clever thing t' do, an' I'm thinkin',' says he, 'that Jagger's near right. Anyhow,' says he, 'Jagger's my owner.'"

Doctor Luke put his elbows on the forecastle table, his chin on his hands—and thus gazed, immovable, at young Docks.

"Skipper Jim," the lad went on, "was a lank old man, with a beard that used t' put me in mind of a dead shrub on a cliff. Old, an' tall, an' skinny he was; an' the flesh of his face was sort o' wet an' whitish, as if it had no feelin'. They wasn't a thing in the way o' wind or sea that Skipper Jim was afeard of. I like a brave man so well as anybody does, but I haven't no love for a fool; an' I've seed *him* beat out o' safe harbour, with all canvas set, when other schooners was reefed down an' runnin' for shelter. Many a time I've took my trick at the wheel when the most I hoped for was three minutes t' say my prayers.

"'Skipper, sir,' we used t' say, when 'twas lookin' black an' nasty t' win'ard an' we was wantin' t' run for the handiest harbour, 'tis like you'll be holdin' on for Rocky Cove. Sure, you've no call t' run for harbour from *this here* blow!'

"'Stand by that main-sheet there!' he'd yell. 'Let her off out o' the wind. We'll be makin' for Harbour Round for shelter. Holdin' on, did you say? My dear man, they's a whirlwind brewin'!'

"But if 'twas blowin' hard—a nor'east snorter, with the gale raisin' a wind-lop on the swell, an' the

night comin' down—if 'twas blowin' barb'rous hard, sometimes we'd get scared.

"'Skipper,' we couldn't help sayin', 'tis time t' get out o' this. Leave us run for shelter, man, for our lives!'

"'Steady, there, at the wheel!' he'd sing out. 'Keep her on her course. 'Tis no more than a clever sailin' breeze.'

"Believe *me*, sir," Docks sighed, "they wasn't a port Skipper Jim wouldn't make, whatever the weather, if he could trade a dress or a Bible or a what-not for a quintal o' fish. 'Docks,' says he, 'Jagger,' says he, 'wants fish, an' *I* got t' get un.' So it wasn't pleasant sailin' along o' him in the fall o' the year, when the wind was all in the nor'east, an' the shore was a lee shore every night o' the week. No, sir! 'twasn't pleasant sailin' along o' Skipper Jim in the *Sink or Swim*. On no account, 'twasn't pleasant! Believe *me*, sir, when I lets my heart feel again the fears o' last fall, I haven't no love left for Jim. No, sir! doin' what he done this summer, I haven't no love left for Jim.

"'It's fish me an' Jagger wants, b'y,' says he t' me, 'an' they's no one 'll keep un from us.'

"'Dear man!' says I, pointin' t' the scales, 'haven't you got no conscience?'

"'Conscience!' says he. 'What's that? Sure,' says he, 'Jagger never *heared* that word!'

"Well, sir, as you knows, there's been a wonderful cotch o' fish on the Labrador side o' the Straits this summer. An' when Skipper Jim hears a Frenchman has brought the smallpox t' Poor Luck Harbour, we was tradin' the French shore o' Newfoundland. Then he up an' cusses the smallpox, an' says he'll make a v'y'ge of it, no matter what. I'm thinkin' 'twas all the fault o' the cook, the skipper bein' the contrary man he was; for the cook he says he've signed t' cook the grub, an' he'll cook 'til he drops in his tracks, but he *haven't* signed t' take the smallpox, an' he'll be jiggered for a squid afore he'll sail t' the Labrador. 'Smallpox!' says the skipper. 'Who says 'tis the smallpox? Me an' Jagger says 'tis the chicken-pox.' So the cook—the skipper havin' the eyes he had—says he'll sail t' the Labrador all right, but he'll see himself hanged for a mutineer afore he'll enter Poor Luck Harbour. 'Poor Luck Harbour, is it?' says the skipper. 'An' is that where they've the—the—smallpox?' says he. 'We'll lay a course for Poor Luck Harbour the morrow. I'll prove 'tis the chicken-pox or eat the man that has it.' So the cook—the skipper havin' the eyes he had—says *he* ain't afraid o' no smallpox, but he knows what 'll come of it if the crew gets ashore.

"'Ho, ho! cook,' says the skipper. 'You'll go ashore along o' *me*, me boy.'

"The next day we laid a course for Poor Luck Harbour, with a fair wind; an' we dropped anchor in the cove that night. In the mornin', sure enough, the skipper took the cook an' the first hand ashore t' show un a man with the chicken-pox; but I was kep' aboard takin' in fish, for such was the evil name the place had along o' the smallpox that we was the only trader in the harbour, an' had all the fish we could handle.

"'Skipper,' says I, when they come aboard, 'is it the smallpox?'

"'Docks, b'y,' says he, lookin' me square in the eye, 'you never yet heard me take back my words. I *said* I'd eat the man that had it. But I tells you what, b'y, I ain't hankerin' after a bite o' what I seed!'

"'We'll be liftin' anchor an' gettin' t' sea, then,' says I; for it made me shiver t' hear the skipper talk that way.

"'Docks, b'y,' says he, 'we'll be liftin' anchor when we gets all the fish they is. Jagger,' says he, 'wants fish, an' I'm the boy t' get un. When the last one's weighed an' stowed, we'll lift anchor an' out; but not afore.'

"We was three days out from Poor Luck Harbour,

tradin' Kiddle Tickle, when Tommy Mib, the first hand, took a suddent chill. 'Tommy, b'y,' says the cook, 'you cotched cold stowin' the jib in the squall day afore yesterday. I'll be givin' *you* a dose o' pain-killer an' pepper.' So the cook give Tommy a wonderful dose o' pain-killer an' pepper an' put un t' bed. But 'twas not long afore Tommy had a pain in the back an' a burnin' headache. 'Tommy, b'y,' says the cook, 'you'll be gettin' the inflammation, I'm thinkin'. I'll have t' put a plaster o' mustard an' red pepper on *your* chest.' So the cook put a wonderful large plaster o' mustard an' red pepper on poor Tommy's chest, an' told un t' lie quiet. Then Tommy got wonderful sick—believe *me*, sir, wonderful sick! An' the cook could do no more, good cook though he was.

"'Tommy,' says he, 'you got something I don't know nothin' about.'

"'Twas about that time that we up with the anchor an' run t' Hollow Cove, where we heard they was a grand cotch o' fish, all dry an' waitin' for the first trader t' pick it up. They'd the smallpox there, sir, accordin' t' rumour; but we wasn't afeard o' cotchin' it—thinkin' we'd not cotched it at Poor Luck Harbour—an' sailed right in t' do the tradin'. We had the last quintal aboard at noon o' the next day; an' we shook out the canvas an' laid a course

t' the nor'ard, with a fair, light wind. We was well out from shore when the skipper an' me went down t' the forecastle t' have a cup o' tea with the cook; an' we was hard at it when Tommy Mib hung his head out of his bunk.

"'Skipper,' says he, in a sick sort o' whisper, 'I'm took.'

"'What's took you?' says the skipper.

"'Skipper,' says he, 'I—I'm—took.'

"'What's took you, you fool?' says the skipper.

"Poor Tommy fell back in his bunk. 'Skipper,' he whines, 'I've cotched it!'

"''Tis the smallpox, sir,' says I. 'I seed the spots.'

"'No such nonsense!' says the skipper. ''Tis the measles. That's what *he've* got. Jagger an' me says so.'

"'But Jagger ain't here', says I.

"'Never you mind about that,' says he. 'I knows what Jagger thinks.'

"When we put into Harbour Grand we knowed it wasn't no measles. When we dropped anchor there, sir, *we knowed what 'twas.* Believe *me*, sir, we *knowed* what 'twas. The cook he up an' says he ain't afraid o' no smallpox, but he'll be sunk for a coward afore he'll go down the forecastle ladder agin. An' the second hand he says he likes a bunk in the

forecastle when he can have one comfortable, but he've no objection t' the hold *at times*. 'Then, lads,' says the skipper, 'you'll not be meanin' t' look that way agin,' says he, with a snaky little glitter in his eye. 'An' if you do, you'll find a fist about the heft o' *that*,' says he, shakin' his hand, 't' kiss you at the foot o' the ladder.' After that the cook an' the second hand slep' in the hold, an' them an' me had a snack o' grub at odd times in the cabin, where I had a hammock slung, though the place was wonderful crowded with goods. 'Twas the skipper that looked after Tommy Mib. 'Twas the skipper that sailed the ship, too,—drove her like he'd always done: all the time eatin' an' sleepin' in the forecastle, where poor Tommy Mib lay sick o' the smallpox. But we o' the crew kep' our distance when the ol' man was on deck; an' they was no rush for'ard t' tend the jib an' stays'l when it was 'Hard a-lee!' in a beat t' win'ard—no rush at all. Believe *me*, sir, they was no rush for'ard—with Tommy Mib below.

"'Skipper Jim,' says I, one day, 'what *is* you goin' t' do?'

"'Well, Docks,' says he, 'I'm thinkin' I'll go see Jagger.'

"So we beat up t' Wayfarer's Tickle—makin' port in the dusk. Skipper Jim went ashore, but took nar a one of us with un. He was there a wonderful

long time; an' when he come aboard, he orders the anchor up an' all sail made.

"'Where you goin'?' says I.

"'Tradin',' says he.

"'Is you?' says I.

"'Ay,' says he. 'Jagger says 'tis a wonderful season for fish.'"

Docks paused. "Skipper Billy," he said, breaking off the narrative and fixing the impassive skipper of the *Greased Lightning* with an anxious eye, "did they have the smallpox at Tops'l Cove? Come now; did they?"

"Ay, sir," Skipper Billy replied; "they had the smallpox at Tops'l Cove."

"Dear man!" Docks repeated, "they had the smallpox at Tops'l Cove! We was three days at Tops'l Cove, with folk aboard every day, tradin' fish. An' Tommy Mib below! We touched Smith's Arm next, sir. Come now, speak fair; did they have it there?"

"They're not rid of it yet," said Doctor Luke.

"Smith's Arm too!" Docks groaned.

"An' Harbour Rim," the skipper added.

"Noon t' noon at Harbour Rim," said Docks.

"And Highwater Cove," the doctor put in.

"Twenty quintal come aboard at Highwater Cove. I mind it well."

"They been dyin' like flies at Seldom Cove."

"Like flies?" Docks repeated, in a hoarse whisper. "Skipper Billy, sir, who—who died—like that?"

Skipper Billy drew his hand over his mouth. "One was a kid," he said, tugging at his moustache.

"My God!" Docks muttered. "One was a kid!"

In the pause—in the silence into which the far-off, wailing chorus of wind and sea crept unnoticed—Skipper Billy and Docks stared into each other's eyes.

"An' a kid died, too," said the skipper.

Again the low, wailing chorus of wind and sea, creeping into the silence. I saw the light in Skipper Billy's eyes sink from a flare to a glow; and I was glad of that.

"'Twas a cold, wet day, with the wind blowin' in from the sea, when we dropped anchor at Little Harbour Deep," Docks continued. "We always kep' the forecastle closed tight an' set a watch when we was in port; an' the forecastle was tight enough that day, but the second hand, whose watch it was, had t' help with the fish, for 'tis a poor harbour there, an' we was in haste t' get out. The folk was loafin' about the deck, fore an' aft, waitin' turns t' weigh fish or be served in the cabin. An' does you know what happened?" Docks asked, tensely. "Can't

you see how 'twas? Believe *me*, sir, 'twas a cold, wet day, a bitter day; an' 'tis no wonder that one o' they folk went below t' warm hisself at the forecastle stove—went below, where poor Tommy Mib was lyin' sick. Skipper, sir," said Docks, with wide eyes, leaning over the table and letting his voice drop, "I seed that man come up—come tumblin' up like mad, sir, his face so white as paint. He'd seed Tommy Mib! An' he yelled, sir; an' Skipper Jim whirled about when he heard that word, an' I seed his lips draw away from his teeth.

"'Over the side, every man o' you!' sings he.

"But 'twas not the skipper's order—'twas that man's horrid cry that sent un over the side. They tumbled into the punts and pushed off. It made me shiver, sir, t' see the fright they was in.

"'Stand by t' get out o' this!' says the skipper.

"'Twas haul on this an' haul on that, an' 'twas heave away with the anchor, 'til we was well under weigh with all canvas spread. We beat out, takin' wonderful chances in the tickle, an' stood off t' the sou'east. That night, when we was well off, the cook says t' me that he *thinks* he've nerve enough t' be boiled in his own pot in a good cause, but he've no mind t' make a Fox's martyr of hisself for the likes o' Skipper Jim.

"'Cook,' says I, 'we'll leave this here ship at the next port.'

"'Docks,' says he, 'tis a clever thought.'

"'Twas Skipper Jim's trick at the wheel, an' I loafed aft t' have a word with un—keepin' well t' win'ward all the time; for he'd just come up from the forecastle.

"'Skipper Jim,' says I, 'we're found out.'

"'What's found out?' says he.

"'The case o' smallpox for'ard,' says I. 'What you goin' t' do about it?'

"'Do!' says he. 'What'll I do? Is it you, Docks, that's askin' me that? Well,' says he, 'Jagger an' me fixed *that* all up when I seed him there t' Wayfarer's Tickle. They's three ports above Harbour Deep, an' I'm goin' t' trade un all. 'Twill be a v'y'ge by that time. Then I'm goin' t' run the *Sink or Swim* back o' the islands in Seal Run. Which done, I'll wait for Tommy Mib t' make up his mind, one way or t' other. If he casts loose, I'll wait, decent as you like, 'til he's well under weigh, when I'll ballast un well an' heave un over. If he's goin' t' bide a spell longer in this world, I'll wait 'til he's steady on his pins. But, whatever, go or stay, I'll fit the schooner with a foretopmast, bark her canvas, paint her black, call her the *Prodigal Son*, an' lay a course for St. Johns. They's not a man on the

docks will take the *Prodigal Son*, black hull, with topmast fore an' aft an' barked sails, inbound from the West Coast with a cargo o' fish—not a man, sir, will take the *Prodigal Son* for the white, single-topmast schooner *Sink or Swim*, up from the Labrador, reported with a case o' smallpox for'ard. For, look you, b'y,' says he, 'nobody knows *me* t' St. Johns.'

"'Skipper Jim,' says I, 'sure you isn't goin' t' put this fish on the market!'

"'Hut!' says he. 'Jagger an' me is worryin' about the price o' fish already.'

"We beat about offshore for three days, with the skipper laid up in the forecastle. Now what do you make o' that? The skipper laid up in the forecastle along o' Tommy Mib—an' Tommy took the way he was! Come, now, what do you make o' that?" We shook our heads, one and all; it was plain that the skipper, too, had been stricken. "Well, sir," Docks went on, "when Skipper Jim come up t' give the word for Rocky Harbour, he looked like a man risin' from the dead. 'Take her there,' says he, 'an' sing out t' me when you're runnin' in.' Then down he went agin; but, whatever, me an' the cook an' the second hand was willin' enough t' sail her t' Rocky Harbour without un, for 'twas in our minds t' cut an' run in the punt when the anchor was down. 'A scurvy trick,' says you, 't' leave old Skipper Jim

an' Tommy Mib in the forecastle, all alone—an' Tommy took that way?' A scurvy trick!" cried Docks, his voice aquiver. "Ay, maybe! But you ain't been aboard no smallpox-ship. You ain't never knowed what 'tis t' lie in your bunk in the dark o' long nights shiverin' for fear you'll be took afore mornin'. An' maybe you hasn't seed a man took the way Tommy Mib was took—not took *quite* that way."

"Yes, I has, b'y," said Skipper Billy, quietly. "'Twas a kid that I seed."

"Was it, now?" Docks whispered, vacantly.

"A kid o' ten years," Skipper Billy replied.

"Ah, well," said Docks, "kids dies young. Whatever," he went on, hurriedly, "the old man come on deck when he was slippin' up the narrows t' the basin at Rocky Harbour.

"'"'Tis the last port I'll trade,' says he, 'for I'm sick, an' wantin' t' get home.'

"We was well up, with the canvas half off her, sailin' easy, on the lookout for a berth, when a punt put out from a stage up alongshore, an' come down with the water curlin' from her bows.

"'"What's the meanin' o' that, Docks?' sings the skipper, pointin' t' the punt. 'They're goin' out o' the course t' keep t' win'ard.'

"'"Skipper Jim,' says I, 'they knows us.'

"'Sink us,' says he, 'they does! They knows what we is an' what we got for'ard. Bring her to!' he sings out t' the man at the wheel.

"When we had the schooner up in the wind, the punt was bobbin' in the lop off the quarter.

"'What ship's that?' says the man in the bow.

"'*Sink or Swim*,' says the skipper.

"'You get out o' here, curse you!' says the man. 'We don't want you here. They's news o' you in every port o' the coast.'

"'I'll bide here 'til I'm ready t' go, sink you!' says the skipper.

"'Oh, no, you won't!' says the man. 'I've a gun or two that says you'll be t' sea agin in half an hour if the wind holds.'

"So when we was well out t' sea agin, the cook he says t' me that he've a wonderful fondness for a run ashore in a friendly port, but he've no mind t' be shot for a mad dog. 'An' we better bide aboard,' says the second hand; 'for 'tis like we'll be took for mad dogs wherever we tries t' land.' Down went the skipper, staggerin' sick; an' they wasn't a man among us would put a head in the forecastle t' ask for orders. So we beat about for a day or two in a foolish way; for, look you! havin' in mind them Rocky Harbour rifles, we didn't well know what t'

do. Three days ago it blew up black an' frothy—a nor'east switcher, with a rippin' wind an' a sea o' mountains. 'Twas no place for a short-handed schooner. Believe *me*, sir, 'twas no place at all! 'Twas time t' run for harbour, come what might; so we asked the cook t' take charge. The cook says t' me that he'd rather be a cook than a skipper, an' a skipper than a ship's undertaker, but he've no objection t' turn his hand t' anything t' 'blige a party o' friends: which he'll do, says he, by takin' the schooner t' Broad Cove o' the Harbourless Shore, which is a bad shelter in a nor'east gale, says he, but the best he can manage.

"So we up an' laid a course for Broad Cove; an' they was three schooners harboured there when we run in. We anchored well outside o' them; an', sure, we thought the schooner was safe, for we knowed she'd ride out what was blowin', if it took so much as a week t' blow out. But it blowed harder—harder yet: a thick wind, squally, too, blowin' dead on shore, where the breakers was leapin' half-way up the cliff. By midnight the seas was smotherin' her, fore an' aft, an' she was tuggin' at her bow anchor chain like a fish at the line. Lord! many a time I thought she'd rip her nose off when a hill o' suddy water come atop of her with a thud an' a hiss.

"'She'll go ashore on them boilin' rocks,' says the cook.

"We was sittin' in the cabin—the cook an' the second hand an' me.

"'' 'Tis wonderful cold,' says the second hand.

"'' I'm chillin,' meself,' says the cook.

"'' Chillin'!' thinks I, havin' in mind the way poor Tommy Mib was took. 'Has you a pain in your back?' says I.

"They was shiverin' a wonderful lot, an' the cook was holdin' his head in his hands, just like Tommy Mib used t' do.

"'' Ay, b'y,' says he.

"'' Ay, b'y,' says the second hand.

"'' Been drilled too hard o' late,' says the cook. 'We're all wore out along o' work an' worry.'

"I didn't wait for no more. 'H-m-m!' says I, 'I thinks I'll take a look outside.'

"It was dawn then. Lord! what a sulky dawn it was! All gray, an' drivin' like mad. The seas was rollin' in, with a frothy wind-lop atop o' them. They'd lift us, smother us, drop us, toss the schooners ridin' in our lee, an' go t' smash on the big, black rocks ashore. Lord! how they pulled at the old *Sink or Swim!* 'Twas like as if they wanted her bad for what she done. Seems t' me the Lord God A'mighty must 'a' knowed what He was about.

Seems to me the Lord God A'mighty said t' Hisself: 'Skipper Jim,' says He, 'I'm through usin' *you*. I've done all the damage I want done along o' you. I've sent some o' the wicked t' beds they chose t' lie on; an' the good folk—all the good folk an' little kids I couldn't wait no longer for, I loved un so —I've took up here. Ay, Jim,' says the Lord God A'mighty, 'I'm through usin' you; an' I got t' get rid o' the old *Sink or Swim*. I'm sorry for the cook an' the second hand an' poor Tommy Mib,' says He, 'wonderful sorry; but I can't run My world no other way. An' when you comes t' think it over,' says He, 'you'll find 'tis the best thing that could happen t' they, for they're took most wonderful bad.' Oh ay," said Docks, with a gentle smile, "the Lord God A'mighty knowed what He was about.

"I went for'ard t' have a look at the chain. Skipper Jim hisself was there, watchin' it close.

"'She's draggin',' says he. But I wouldn't 'a' knowed that voice for Skipper Jim's—'twas so hollow and breathless. 'She's draggin',' says he. 'Let her drag. They's a better anchorage in there a bit. She'll take the bottom agin afore she strikes them craft.'

"We was draggin' fast—bearin' straight down on the craft inside. They was a trader an' two Labrador fishin'-craft. The handiest was a fishin' boat, bound

home with the summer's cotch, an' crowded with men, women, an' kids. We took the bottom an' held fast within thirty fathom of her bow. I could see the folk on deck—see un plain as I sees you—hands an' lips an' eyes. They was swarmin' fore an' aft like a lot o' scared seal—wavin' their arms, shakin' their fists, jabberin', leapin' about in the wash o' the seas that broke over the bows.

"'Docks,' says the skipper, 'what's the matter with they folk, anyhow? We isn't draggin', is we?' says he, half cryin'. 'We isn't hurtin' *they*, is we?'

"An old man—'tis like he was skipper o' the craft—come runnin' for'ard, with half a dozen young fellows in his wake. 'Sheer off!' sings the old one. He jabbered a bit more, all the while wavin' us off, but a squall o' wind carried it all away. 'We'll shoot you like dogs an you don't!' says one o' the young ones; an' at that I felt wonderful mean an' wicked an' sorry. Back aft they went. There they talked an' talked; an' as they talked they pointed—pointed t' the breakers that was boilin' over the black rocks; pointed t' the spumey sea an' t' the low, ragged clouds drivin' across it; pointed t' the *Sink or Swim*. Then the skipper took the wheel, an' the crew run for'ard t' the windlass an' jib sheets.

"'Skipper, sir,' says I, 'they're goin' t' slip anchor an' run!'

"'Ay,' says Skipper Jim, 'they knows us, b'y! They knows the *Sink or Swim*. We lies t' win'ard, an' they're feared o' the smallpox. They'll risk that craft—women an' kids an' all—t' get away. They isn't a craft afloat can beat t' sea in this here gale. They'll founder, lad, or they'll drive on the rocks an' loss themselves, all hands. 'Tis an evil day for this poor old schooner, Docks,' says he, with a sob, 'that men'll risk the lives o' kids an' women t' get away from her; an' 'tis an evil day for my crew.' With that he climbed on the rail, cotched the foremast shrouds with one hand, put the other to his mouth, an' sung out: 'Ahoy, you! Bide where you is! Bide where you is!' Then he jumped down; an' he says t' me, 'tween gasps, for the leap an' shout had taken all the breath out of un, 'Docks,' says he, 'they's only one thing for a man t' do in a case like this. Get the jib up, b'y. I'm goin' aft t' the wheel. Let the anchor chain run out when you sees me wave my hand. See, lad,' says he, pointin' t' leeward, 'they're waitin', aboard that fishin' craft, t' see what we'll do. We'll show un that we're men! Jagger be damned,' says he; 'we'll show un that we're men! Call the hands,' says he; 'but leave Tommy Mib lie quiet in his bunk,' says he, 'for he's dead.'

"'Skipper Jim,' says I, lookin' in his blood-red eyes, an' then t' the breakers, 'what you goin' t' do?'

"'Beach her,' says he.

"'Is you gone an' forgot,' says I, 'about Jagger?'

"'Never you mind about Jagger, Docks,' says he. 'I'll see *him*,' says he, 'later. Call the hands,' says he, 'an' we'll wreck her like men!'"

Docks covered his face with his hands. Place was once more given to the noises of the gale. He looked up—broken, listless; possessed again by the mood of that time.

"An' what did *you* say, lad?" Skipper Billy whispered.

"I hadn't no objection," sighed the lad.

The answer was sufficient.

"So I called the hands," Docks went on. "An' when the second hand cotched sight o' the rocks we was bound for, he went mad, an' tumbled over the taffrail; an' the cook was so weak a lurch o' the ship flung him after the second hand afore we reached the breakers. I never seed Skipper Jim no more; nor the cook, nor the second hand, nor poor Tommy Mib. But I'm glad the Lord God A'mighty give Jim the chance t' die right, though he'd lived wrong. Oh, ay! I'm fair glad the good Lord done that. The Labradormen give us a cheer when the chain went rattlin' over an' the *Sink or Swim* gathered way —a cheer, sir, that beat its way agin the wind—God

bless them!—an' made me feel that in the end I was a man agin. She went t' pieces when she struck," he added, as if in afterthought; "but I'm something of a hand at swimmin', an' I got ashore on a bit o' spar. An' then I come down the coast 'til I found you lyin' here in the lee o' Saul's Island." After a pause, he said hoarsely, to Skipper Billy: "They had the smallpox at Tops'l Cove, says you? They got it yet at Smith's Arm? At Harbour Rim an' High-water Cove they been dyin'? How did they die at Seldom Cove? Like flies, says you? An' one was a kid?"

"*My* kid," said Skipper Billy, quietly still.

"My God!" cried Docks. "*His* kid! How does that there song go? What about they lakes o' fire? Wasn't it,

"'They's lakes o' fire in hell t' sail for such as Skipper Jim!'

you sung? Lord! sir, I'm thinkin' I'll have t' ship along o' Skipper Jim once more!"

"No, no, lad!" cried Skipper Billy, speaking from the heart. "For you was willin' t' die right. But God help Jagger on the mornin' o' the Judgment Day! I'll be waitin' at the foot o' the throne o' God t' charge un with the death o' my wee kid!"

Doctor Luke sat there frowning.

XXVI

DECOYED

DESPITE Skipper Billy's anxious, laughing protest that 'twas not yet fit weather to be at sea, the doctor next day ordered the sail set: for, as he said, he was all of a maddening itch to be about certain business, of a professional and official turn, at our harbour and Wayfarer's Tickle, and could no longer wait the pleasure of a damned obstinate nor'east gale—a shocking way to put it, indeed, but vastly amusing when uttered with a fleeting twinkle of the eye: vastly convincing, too, followed by a snap of the teeth and the gleam of some high, heroic purpose. So we managed to get the able little *Greased Lightning* into the thick of it—merrily into the howl and gray frown of that ill-minded sea—and, though wind and sea, taking themselves seriously, conspired to smother her, we made jolly reaches to the nor'ard, albeit under double reefs, and came that night to Poor Luck Harbour, where the doctor's sloop was waiting. There we bade good-bye to the mood-stricken Docks, and a short farewell to Skipper Billy, who must return into the service of the

Government doctors from St. Johns, now, at last, active in the smallpox ports. And next morning, the wind having somewhat abated in the night, the doctor and I set sail for our harbour, where, two days later, with the gale promising to renew itself, we dropped anchor: my dear sister, who had kept watch from her window, now waiting on my father's wharf.

It seemed to me then—and with utmost conviction I uttered the feeling abroad, the while perceiving no public amusement—that the powers of doctors were fair witchlike: for no sooner had my sweet sister swallowed the first draught our doctor mixed—nay, no sooner had it been offered her in the silver spoon, and by the doctor, himself—than her soft cheek turned the red of health, and her dimples, which of late had been expressionless, invited kisses in a fashion the most compelling, so that a man of mere human parts would swiftly take them, though he were next moment hanged for it. I marvel, indeed, that Doctor Luke could resist them; but resist he did: as I know, for, what with lurking and peeping (my heart being anxiously enlisted), I took pains to discover the fact, and was in no slight degree distressed by it. For dimples were made for kissing—else for what?—and should never go unsatisfied;

they are so frank in pleading that 'twould be sheer outrage for the lips of men to feel no mad desire: which, thank God! seldom happens. But, then, what concern have I, in these days, with the identical follies of dimples and kissing?

"'Tis a wonderful clever doctor," said I to my sister, my glance fixed in amazement on her glowing cheeks, "that we got in Doctor Luke."

"Ah, yes!" she sighed: but so demure that 'twas not painful to hear it.

"An', ecod!" I declared, "'tis a wonderful clever medicine that he've been givin' you."

"Ecod! Davy Roth," she mocked, a sad little laugh in her eyes, "an' how," said she, "did you manage to find it out?"

"Bessie!" cried I, in horror. "Do you stop that swearin'! For an you don't," I threatened, "I'll give you ——"

"Hut!" she flouted. "'Tis your own word."

"Then," I retorted, "I'll never say it again. Ecod! but I won't."

She pinched my cheek.

"An' I'm wonderin'," I sighed, reverting to the original train of thought, which was ever a bothersome puzzle, "how he can keep from kissin' you when he puts the spoon in your mouth. Sure," said I, "he've such a wonderful good chance t' do it!"

It may have been what I said; it may have been a familiar footfall in the hall: at any rate, my sister fled in great confusion. And, pursuing heartily, I caught her in her room before she closed the door, but retreated in haste, for she was already crying on the bed. Whereupon, I gave up the puzzle of love, once and for all; and, as I sought the windy day, I was established in the determination by a glimpse of the doctor, sitting vacant as an imbecile in the room where my sister and I had been: whom I left to his own tragedy, myself being wearied out of patience by it.

"The maid that turns *me* mad," was my benighted reflection, as I climbed the Watchman to take a look at the weather, "will be a wonderful clever hand."

Unhappily, there had been no indictable offense in Jagger's connection with the horrid crimes of the *Sink or Swim* (as the doctor said with a wry face): for Docks would be but a poor witness in a court of law at St. Johns' knowing nothing of his own knowledge, but only by hearsay; and the bones of Skipper Jim already lay stripped and white in the waters of the Harbourless Shore. But, meantime, the doctor kept watch for opportunity to send frank warning to the man of Wayfarer's Tickle; and,

soon, chance offered by way of the schooner *Bound Down*, Skipper Immerly Swat, whom the doctor charged, with a grim little grin, to inform the evil fellow that he was to be put in jail, out of hand, when first he failed to walk warily: a message to which Jagger returned (by the skipper of the *Never Say Die*) an answer of the sauciest—so saucy, indeed, that the doctor did not repeat it, but flushed and kept silent. And now the coast knew of the open war; and great tales came to us of Jagger's laughter and loose-mouthed boasting—of his hate and ridicule and defiant cursing: so that the doctor wisely conceived him to be upon the verge of some cowardly panic. But the doctor went about his usual work, healing the sick, quietly keeping the helm of our business, as though nothing had occurred: and grimly waited for the inevitable hour.

Jonas Jutt, of Topmast Tickle, with whom we had passed a Christmas Eve—the father of Martha and Jimmie and Sammy Jutt—came by stealth to our harbour to speak a work with the doctor. "Doctor Luke," said he, between his teeth, "I'm this year in service t' Jagger o' Wayfarer's Tickle; an' I've heared tell o' the quarrel atween you; an' . . ."

"Yes?" the doctor inquired.

"I've took sides."

"I rather think," the doctor observed, "that

you can tell me something I very much want to know."

"I've no wish, God knows!" Jonas continued, with deep feeling, "t' betray my master. But you—*you*, zur—cured my child, an' I'm wantin' t' do you a service."

"I think you can."

"I knows I can! I know—I *knows*—that which will put Jagger t' makin' brooms in the jail t' St. Johns."

"Ah!" the doctor drawled. "I wish," said he, "that I knew that."

"I knows," Jonas pursued, doggedly, though it went against the grain, "that last week he wrecked the *Jessie Dodd* on the Ragged Edge at Wayfarer's Tickle. I knows that she was insured for her value and fifteen hundred quintal o' Labrador fish. I knows that they wasn't a fish aboard. I knows that every fish is safe stowed in Jagger's stores. I knows that the schooner lies near afloat at high tide. I knows that she'll go t' pieces in the winter gales. I knows ——"

The doctor lifted his hand. He was broadly smiling. "You have told me," said he, "quite enough. Go back to Wayfarer's Tickle. Leave me," he added, "to see that Jagger learns the worthy trade of broom-making. You have done me—great service."

"Ah, but," cried Jonas, gripping the doctor's hand, "*you* cured my little Sammy!"

The doctor mused. "It may be difficult," he said, by and by, "to fix this wreck upon Jagger."

"Hist!" Jonas replied, stepping near. "The skipper o' the *Jessie Dodd*," he whispered, pointedly, solemnly closing one eye, "is wonderful weak in the knees."

Doctor and I went then in the sloop to Wayfarer's Tickle (the wind favouring us); and there we found the handsome *Jessie Dodd* lying bedraggled and disconsolate on the Ragged Edge, within the harbour: slightly listed, but afloat aft, and swinging with the gentle lift and fall of the water. We boarded her, sad at heart that a craft so lovely should come to a pass like this; and 'twas at once plain to us sailormen that 'twas a case of ugly abandonment, if not of barratry—plain, indeed, to such as knew the man, that in conspiracy with the skipper Jagger had caused the wreck of the schooner, counting upon the isolation of the place, the lateness of the season, the simplicity of the folk, the awe in which they held him—upon all this to conceal the crime: as often happens on our far-off coast. So we took the skipper into custody (and this with a high hand) unknown to Jagger—got him, soon, safe into the sloop: so cowed and undone by the doctor's manner that he

miserably whined for chance to turn Queen's evidence in our behalf. 'Twas very sad—nauseating, too: so that one wished to stop the white, writhing lips with a hearty buffet; for rascals should be strong, lest their pitiful complaints distress the hearts of honest men, who have not deserved the cruel punishment.

Jagger came waddling down to the landing, his great dog at his heels. "What you doin'," he demanded, scowling like a thunder-storm, "with that man?"

"I next call your attention," the doctor answered, with a smile of the most engaging sort, like a showman once I saw in the South, "to the most be-*witch*-ing exhibit in this vast concourse of wonders. We have here—don't crowd, *if* you please—we have here the skipper of the schooner *Jessie Dodd*, cast away on the Ragged Edge at Wayfarer's Tickle. He is—and I direct your particular attention to the astounding fact—under arrest; being taken by a magistrate duly appointed by the authorities at St. Johns. Observe, if you will, his—ah—rather abject condition. Mark his penitent air. Conceive, if you can, the—ah—ardour with which he will betray——"

Jagger turned on his heel—and went wearily away. And I have never forgiven the doctor his light manner upon this wretched occasion: for it

seems to me (but I am not sure of it) that rascals, also, are entitled to the usual courtesy. At any rate, in uttermost despair we paid for the lack of it.

I copy, now, from the deposition of Allworthy Grubb, master of the schooner *Jessie Dodd*, Falmouth, England, as taken that night at our harbour: "*The 'Jessie Dodd' was chartered by Thomas Jagger, doing business at Wayfarer's Tickle, to load fish for across. . . . I do hereby make a voluntary statement, with my own free will, and without any inducement whatever. . . . Thomas Jagger offered me, if I would put the 'Jessie Dodd' ashore, he would give me half the profits realized on ship and cargo. This he promised me on a Sunday morning in his fish stage opposite to where the ship was put ashore. After the ship was put ashore he no longer discussed about the money I was to receive. . . . Two days before the 'Jessie Dodd' was put ashore I broke the wheel chain and tied the links with spunyarn. I showed the broken links to Mr. Jagger. The day we were starting there was rum served out to the crew. Mr. Jagger supplied it. When the vessel started, nearly all the crew were drunk. I had the wheel. About five minutes after she started I cut the spunyarn. The vessel began to go on the rocks. One of the crew shouted, 'Hard-a-starboard!' I shouted*

that the port wheel chain was broken. Then the vessel went ashore. . . . Mr. Jagger sent a kettle of rum aboard, which I had served to the crew. No attempt was made to get the vessel off. . . . When I saw Mr. Jagger he told me I was a seven kinds of a fool for putting her ashore where I did. He said it would be all right, anyhow. He said they were all afraid of him. He said no one would give it away. . . . I am guilty of putting the 'Jessie Dodd' ashore, for which I am extremely sorry of being prompted to do so by Thomas Jagger, and to be so sadly led away into such depravity. Had it not been for such an irreproachable character, which I have held previous to this dreadful act, ten minutes after the occurrence I would have given myself up. Not one hour since but what I have repented bitterly. . . ." I present this that the doctor may not appear unfairly to have initiated a prosecution against his enemy: though that were a blessing to our coast.

"Davy," said the doctor, briskily, when the writing was done, "I must leave Captain Grubb to your hospitality for a time. It will be necessary for me to go south to the cable station at Chateau. The support of Lloyds—since Jagger has influence at St. Johns—will be invaluable in this case."

He set sail in the sloop next day.

It was now late in the fall of the year. Young slob ice was forming by night in the quiet places of the harbour. The shiver of winter was everywhere abroad. . . . For a week the weather continued ominous—with never a glint of sunshine to gladden us. Drear weather, treacherous—promising grief and pain. Off shore, the schooners of the great fleet crept by day to the s'uth'ard, harbouring by night: taking quick advantage of the variable winds, as chance offered. 'Twas thus that the doctor returned to our harbour; and there he was held, from day to day, by vicious winds, which the little sloop could not carry, by great, black seas, which she could not ride. . . . One day, being ill at ease, we went to the Watchman, that we might descry the first favourable sign. In the open, the wind was still to the north of east—but wildly capricious: blowing hither and thither; falling, too, to a sigh, rising, all at once, to a roaring gust, which tore at the whisps of grass and fairly sucked the breath from one's body. Overhead, the sky was low and tumultuous; great banks of black cloud, flecked with gray and white—ragged masses—went flying inland, as in a panic. There was no quiet light in the east, no clean air between; 'twas everywhere thick—everywhere sullen. . . . We left the Watchman downcast—each, too, preoccupied. In my heart was the

heavy feeling that some sad thing was about to befall us. . . .

I must tell, now, that, before the smallpox came to Poor Luck Harbour, the doctor had chartered the thirty-ton *Trap and Seine* for our business: with which Skipper Tommy Lovejoy and the twins, with four men of our harbour, had subsequently gone north to Kidalik, where the fishing was reported good beyond dreams. 'Twas time for the schooner to be home. She was long overdue; and in great anxiety we awaited her return or news of her misfortune: the like of which often happens on our coast, where news proceeds only by word of mouth. 'Twas in part in hope of catching sight of her barked topsail that we had gone to the Watchman. But at that moment the *Trap and Seine* lay snug at anchor in Wayfarer's Tickle: there delayed for more civil weather in which to attempt the passage of the Bay, for she was low in the water with her weight of fish, and Skipper Tommy had a mind to preserve his good fortune against misadventure. And, next day, the wind being still unfavourable, he had Timmie row him ashore, that he might pass an hour in talk with the men on Jagger's wharf: for there was nothing better to do, and the wreck of the *Jessie Dodd* was food of the choicest for water-side gossip. To

him, by and by, came Jagger's clerk: begging that the *Trap and Seine* might be got under weigh for our harbour within the hour, for Jagger lay near death (having been taken in the night) and sorely needed the doctor, lest he die.

"Die!" cried Skipper Tommy, much distressed. "That's fair awful. Poor man! So sick as that?"

"Ay," the clerk replied, with a sharp little look into Skipper Tommy's mild eyes, "he'll die."

"Ecod!" the skipper declared. "'Twill make the doctor sad t' know it!"

Skipper Tommy remembers that the clerk turned away, as if, for some strange reason, to get command of himself.

"That he will," said the clerk.

"'Tis awful!" the skipper repeated. "I'll get the schooner t' sea this minute. She's wonderful low in the water," he mused, pulling at his nose; "but I'm thinkin' the doctor would rather save a life than get a cargo o' green fish t' harbour."

"Dying, tell him," the clerk urged, smoothing his mouth with a lean hand. "Dying—and in terror of hell."

"Afeared o' hell?"

"Gone mad with fear of damnation."

Skipper Tommy raised his hands. "That's aw-

ful!" he muttered, with a sad shake of the head. "Tell that poor man the doctor will come. Tell un, oh, tell un," he added, wringing his hands, "*not* t' be afeared o' hell!"

"Yes, yes!" the clerk exclaimed, impatiently. "Don't forget the message. Jagger lies sick, and dying, and begging for help."

Skipper Tommy made haste to the small boat, the while raising a cry for Timmie, who had gone about his own pleasure, the Lord knew where! And Timmie ran down the path, as fast as his sea-boots would go: but was intercepted by Jonas Jutt, who drew him into the lower fish-stage, as though in fear of observation, and there whispered the circumstances of the departure of the *Trap and Seine*.

"But do you tell your father," he went on, "that Jagger's not sick."

"Not sick?" cried Timmie, under his breath.

"Tell your father that I heared Jagger say he'd prove the doctor a coward or drown him."

Timmie laughed.

"Tell un," Jonas whispered, speaking in haste and great excitement, "that Jagger's as hearty drunk as ever he was—loaded t' the gunwale with rum an' hate—in dread o' the trade o' broom-makin'—desperate t' get clear o' the business o' the *Jessie Dodd*.

Tell un he wants t' drown the doctor atween your harbour an' Wayfarer's Tickle. Tell un t' give no heed t' the message. Tell un t'——"

"Oh, Lard!" Timmie gurgled, in a spasm of delight.

"Tell un t' have the doctor stay at home 'til the weather lifts. Tell un——"

In response to an urgent call from the skipper, who was waiting at the small-boat, Timmie ran out. As he stumbled down the path, emitting guffaws and delicious chuckles, he conceived—most unhappily for us all—an infinitely humorous plan, which would still give him the delight of a rough passage to our harbour: for Timmie loved a wet deck and a reeling beat to windward, under a low, driving sky, with the night coming down, as few lads do. Inform the skipper? Not Timmie! Nor would he tell even Jacky. He would disclose the plot at a more dramatic moment. When the beat was over—when the schooner had made harbour—when the anchor was down—when the message was delivered—in the thick of the outcry of protest against the doctor's high determination to venture upon the errand of mercy—*then* Timmie Lovejoy, the dramatic opportunity having come, would, with proper regard for his own importance, make the astounding revelation. It would be quite thrilling (he thought); moreover,

it would be a masterly joke on his father, who took vast delight in such things.

"The wind's veerin' t' the s'uth'ard," said the skipper, anxiously, while they put a double reef in the mainsail. "'Twill be a rough time across."

"Hut! dad," Timmie answered. "Sure, *you* can make harbour."

"Ecod!" Jacky added, with a grin. "You're the man t' do it, dad—*you're* the man t' drive her!"

"Well, lads," the flattered skipper admitted, resting from the wrestle with the obstinate sail, and giving his nose a pleased sort of tweak, "I isn't sayin' I'm not."

So, low as she was—sunk with the load in her hold and the gear and casks and what-not on her deck—they took the *Trap and Seine* into the gale. And she made brave weather of it—holding her own stoutly, cheerily shaking the frothy water from her bows: though 'twas an unfair task to put her to. Skipper Tommy put the first hand at the mainsail halliards, the second hand at the foresail, with orders to cut away at the lift of his hand, lest the vessel get on her beam's ends and capsize. 'Twas thus that they drove her into the wind—stout hearts and stout timber: no wavering or weak complaint, whatever the wind and sea. But night caught them off our harbour—deep night: with the headlands near lost

in the black sky; no more than the looming, changing shadow of the hills and the intermittent flash of breakers to guide the way. They were now beating along shore, close to Long Cove of the mainland, which must then have lain placid in the lee of Naked Point. At the cry of "Hard-a-lee!"—sung out in terror when the breakers were fair under the bow—the ship came about and fell off towards the open sea. Then came three great waves; they broke over the bow—swept the schooner, stem to stern, the deck litter going off in a rush of white water. The first wrenched Jacky from his handhold; but Skipper Tommy, standing astern, caught him by the collar as the lad went over the taffrail. Came, then, with the second wave, Timmie, whom, also, the skipper caught. But 'twas beyond the old man's power to lift both to the deck: nor could he cry for help, nor choose whom to drop, loving them alike; but desperately clung to both until the rush of the third wave tore one away.

It was Timmie.

Skipper Tommy Lovejoy, making into our harbour, by way of the Gate, in the depths of that wild night—poor old Skipper Tommy, blind and broken by grief—ran his loaded schooner into the Trap and wrecked her on the Seven Murderers, where she

went to pieces on the unfeeling rocks. But we managed to get the crew ashore, and no man lost his life at that time. And Skipper Tommy, sitting bowed in my father's house, told us in a dull, slow way—made tragic, from time to time, by the sweet light in his eye, by the flitting shadow of a smile—told us, thus, that Jagger of Wayfarer's Tickle lay at the point of death, in fear of hell, crying for the help of his enemy: and then put his arm about Jacky, and went with him to the Rat Hole, there to bury his sorrow, that it might not distress us the more, who sorrowed, also.

XXVII

The DAY of The DOG

I WAS awakened at dawn. 'Twas by a gentle touch of the doctor's hand. "Is it you, zur?" I asked, starting from sad dreams.

"Hush!" he whispered. "'Tis I, Davy."

I listened to the roar of the gale—my sleepy senses immediately aroused by the noise of wind and sleet. The gathered rage was loosed, at last.

"'Tis a bitter night," I said.

"The day is breaking."

He sat down beside me, gravely silent; and he put his arm around me.

"You isn't goin'?" I pleaded.

"Yes."

I had grown to know his duty. 'Twas all plain to me. I would not have held him from it, lest I come to love him less.

"Ay," I moaned, gripping his hand, "you're goin'!"

"Yes," he said.

We sat for a moment without speaking. The gale went whipping past—driving madly through

the breaking day: a great rush of black, angry weather. 'Twas dim in the room. I could not see his face—but felt his arm warm about me: and wished it might continue there, and that I might fall asleep, serene in all that clamour, sure that I might find it there on waking, or seek it once again, when sore need came. And I thought, even then, that the Lord had been kind to us: in that this man had come sweetly into our poor lives, if but for a time.

"You isn't goin' alone, is you?"

"No. Skipper Tommy is coming to sail the sloop."

Again—and fearsomely—the gale intruded upon us. There was a swish of wind, rising to a long, mad shriek—the roar of rain on the roof—the rattle of windows—the creaking of the timbers of our house. I trembled to hear it.

"Oh, doctor!" I moaned.

"Hush!" he said.

The squall subsided. Rain fell in a monotonous patter. Light crept into the room.

"Davy!"

"Ay, zur?"

"I'm going, now."

"Is you?"

He drew me very close. "I've come to say good-

bye," he said. My head sank in great misgiving against him. I could not say one word. "And you know, lad," he continued, "that I love your sister. Tell her, when I am gone, that I love her. Tell her ——"

He paused. "An' what, zur," I asked, "shall I tell my sister for you?"

"Tell her—that I love her. No!" he cried. "'Tis not that. Tell her ——"

"Ay?"

"That I loved her!"

"Hist!" I whispered, not myself disquieted by this significant change of form. "She's stirrin' in her room."

It may be that the doctor loved my sister through me—that I found some strange place in his great love for her, to which I had no title, but was most glad to have. For, then, in the sheltering half-light, he lifted me from my bed—crushed me against his breast—held me there, whispering messages I could not hear—and gently laid me down again, and went in haste away. And I dressed in haste: but fumbled at all the buttons, nor could quickly lay hands on my clothes, which were scattered everywhere, by my sad habit; so that, at last, when I was clad for the weather, and had come to my father's wharf, the sloop was cast off. Skipper Tommy sat in the stern,

his face grimly set towards North Tickle and the hungry sea beyond: nor did he turn to look at me. But the doctor waved his hand—and laughed a new farewell.

I did not go to the hills—because I had no heart for that (and had no wish to tell my sister what might be seen from there): but sat grieving on a big box, in the lee of the shop, drumming a melancholy refrain with my heels. And there I sat while the sad light of day spread over the rocky world; and, by and by, the men came out of the cottages—and *they* went to the hills of God's Warning, as I knew they would—and came back to the wharf to gossip: but in my presence were silent concerning what they had seen at sea, so that, when I went up to our house, I did not know what the sloop was making of the gale. And when I crossed the threshold, 'twas to a vast surprise: for my breakfast was set on a narrow corner of the kitchen table (and had turned cold); and the whole house was in an amazing state of dust and litter and unseasonable confusion—the rugs lifted, the tables and chairs awry, the maids wielding brooms with utmost vigour: a comfortless prospect, indeed, but not foreign to my sister's way at troublous times, as I knew. So I ate my breakfast, and that heartily (being a boy);

and then sought my sister, whom I found tenderly dusting in my mother's room.

"'Tis queer weather, Bessie," said I, in gentle reproof, "for cleanin' house."

She puckered her brow—a sad little frown: but sweet, as well, for, downcast or gay, my sister could be naught else, did she try it.

"Is you thinkin' so, Davy?" she asked, pulling idly at her dust-rag. "Ah, well!" she sighed.

"Why," I exclaimed, "'tis the queerest I ever knowed!"

"I been thinkin'," she mused, "that I'd get the house tidied up—while the doctor's away."

"Oh, *was* you?"

"Ay," she said, looking up; "for he've such a wonderful distaste for dust an' confusion. An' I'll have the house all in order," she added, with a wan smile, "when he gets back."

'Tis the way of women to hope; but that my clever sister should thus count sure that which lay in grave doubt—admitting no uncertainty—was beyond my understanding.

"Does you think," she asked, looking away, "that he will be back"—she hesitated—"the morrow?"

I did not deign to reply.

"May be," she muttered, "the day after."

'Twas hard to believe it of her. "Bessie," I be-

gan, ignoring her folly, "afore the doctor went, he left a message for you."

Her hands went swiftly to her bosom. "For me?" she whispered. "Ah, tell me, Davy!"

"I'm just about t' tell," said I, testily. "But, sure, 'tis nothin' t' put you in a state. When he come t' my room," I proceeded, "at dawn, t' say good-bye, he left a message. 'Tell her,' said he, 'that I love her.'"

It seemed to me, then, that she suffered—that she felt some glorious agony: of which, as I thought, lads could know nothing. And I wondered why.

"That he loves me!" she murmured.

"No," said I. "'Tell her not that,' said he," I went on. "'Tell her that I loved her.'"

"Not that!" she cried. "'Twas that he loves me —*not* that he loved me!"

"'Twas that he loved you."

"Oh, no!"

"I got it right."

"Ah, then," she cried, in despair, "he've no hope o' comin' back! Oh," she moaned, clasping her hands, "if only I had ——"

But she sighed—and turned again to her womanly task; and I left her tenderly caring for my mother's old room. And when, at midday, I came up from the wharf, I found the house restored to order and

quiet: my sister sitting composed in my mother's place, smiling a welcome across the table, as my mother used to do. And I kissed her—for I loved her!

It blew up bitter cold—the wind rising: the sea turned white with froth. 'Twas a solemn day—like a sad Sunday, when a man lies dead in the harbour. No work was done—no voice was lifted boisterously—no child was out of doors: but all clung peevishly to their mothers' skirts. The men on the wharf—speculating in low, anxious voices—with darkened eyes watched the tattered sky: the rushing, sombre clouds, still in a panic fleeing to the wilderness. They said the sloop would not outlive the gale. They said 'twas a glorious death that the doctor and Skipper Thomas Lovejoy had died; thus to depart in the high endeavour to succour an enemy—but shed no tears: for 'tis not the way of our folk to do it. . . . Rain turned to sleet—sleet to black fog. The smell of winter was in the air. There was a feeling of snow abroad. . . . Then came the snow—warning flakes, driving strangely through the mist, where no snow should have been. Our folk cowered—not knowing what they feared: but by instinct perceiving a sudden change of season, for which they were not ready; and were disquieted. . . .

What a rush of feeling and things done—what rage and impulsive deeds—came then! The days are not remembered—but lie hid in a mist, as I write. . . . Timmie Lovejoy crawled into our harbour in the dusk of that day: having gone ashore at Long Cove with the deck-litter of the *Trap and Seine;* which surprised us not at all, for we are used to such things. And when he gave us the message (having now, God knows! a tragic opportunity, but forgetting that)—when he sobbed that Jagger, being in sound health, would prove the doctor a coward or drown him—we determined to go forthwith by the coast rocks to Wayfarer's Tickle to punish Jagger in some way for the thing he had done. And when I went up the path to tell my poor sister of the villany practiced upon the doctor, designed to compass his very death—ah! 'tis dreadful to recall it—when I went up the path, my mother's last prayer pleading in my soul, the whitening world was all turned red; and my wish was that, some day, I might take my enemy by the throat, whereat I would tear with my naked fingers, until my hands were warm with blood. . . . But it came on to snow; and for two days and nights snow fell, the wind blowing mightily: so that no man could well move from his own house. And when the wind went down, and the day dawned clear again, we put the dogs to my father's komatik

and set out for Wayfarer's Tickle: whence Jagger had that morning fled, as Jonas Jutt told us.

"Gone!" cried Tom Tot.

"T' the s'uth'ard with the dogs. He's bound t' the Straits Shore t' get the last coastal boat t' Bay o' Islands."

"Gone!" we repeated, blankly.

"Ay—but ten hours gone. In mad haste—alone—ill provisioned—fleein' in terror. . . . He sat on the hills—sat there like an old crag—in the rain an' wind—waitin' for the doctor's sloop. 'There she is, Jutt!' says he. 'No,' says I. 'Thank God, Jagger, that's a schooner, reefed down an' runnin' for harbour!' . . . 'There she is!' says he. 'No,' says I. 'Thank God, that's the same schooner, makin' heavy weather o' the gale!' . . . 'There she is, Jutt!' says he. 'Ay,' says I, 'God help her, that's the doctor's sloop! They've wrecked the *Trap an' Seine!*' . . . An' there he sat, watchin', with his chin on his hand, 'til the doctor's sloop went over, an' the fog drifted over the sea where she had been. . . . An' then he went home; an' no man seed un agin 'til he called for the dogs. An' he went away—in haste—alone—like a man gone mad. . . ."

The lean-handed clerk broke in. He was blue

about the lips—his eyes sunk in shadowy pits—and he was shivering.

"'Timmons,' says he to me," he chattered, "'I'm going home. I done wrong,' says he. 'They'll kill me for this.'"

"An' when he got the dogs in the traces," Jonas proceeded, "I seed he wasn't ready for no long journey. 'Good Lord, Jagger,' says I, 'you isn't got no grub for the dogs!' 'Dogs!' says he. 'I'll feed the dogs with me whip.' 'Jagger,' says I, 'don't you try it. They won't *eat* a whip. They can't *live* on it.' 'Never you fear,' says he. 'I'll feed them ugly brutes when they gets me t' Cape Charles Harbour.' 'Jagger,' says I, 'you better look out they don't feed theirselves afore they gets you there. You got a ugly leader,' says I, 'in that red-eyed brute.' 'Him?' says he. 'Oh, I got *him* broke!' But he *didn't* have——"

"And with that," said the clerk, "off he put."

"Men," cried Tom Tot, looking about upon our group, "we'll cotch un yet!"

So we set out in pursuit of Jagger of Wayfarer's Tickle, who had fled over the hills—I laugh to think of it—with an ugly, red-eyed leader, to be fed with a whip: which dog I knew. . . . No snow fell. The days were clear—the nights moonlit. Bitter cold continued. We followed a plain track—sleep-

ing by night where the quarry had slept. . . . Day after day we pushed on: with no mercy on the complaining dogs—plunging through the drifts, whipping the team up the steeper hills, speeding when the going lay smooth before us. . . . By and by we drew near. Here and there the snow was significantly trampled. There were signs of confusion and cross purposes. The man was desperately fighting his dogs. . . . One night, the dogs were strangely restless—sniffing the air, sleepless, howling; nor could we beat them to their beds in the snow: they were like wolves. And next day—being then two hours after dawn—we saw before us a bloody patch of snow: whereupon Tom Tot cried out in horror.

"Oh, dear God!" he muttered, turning with a gray face. "They've eat him up!"

Then—forgetting the old vow—he laughed.

. . . And this was true. They had eaten him up. The snow was all trampled and gory. They had eaten him up. Among the tatters of his garments, I found a hand; and I knew that hand for the hand of Jagger of Wayfarer's Tickle. . . . They had turned wolves—they had eaten him up. From far off—the crest of a desolate hill—there came a long howl. I looked towards that place. A great

dog appeared—and fled. I wondered if the dog I knew had had his day. I wondered if the first grip had been upon the throat. . . .

When we came again to our harbour—came close again to the grief we had in rage and swift action forgot—when, from the inland hills, we caught sight of the basin of black water, and the cottages, snuggled by the white waterside—we were amazed to discover a schooner lying at anchor off my father's wharf: the wreck of a craft, her topmast hanging, her cabin stove in, her jib-boom broke off short. But this amazement—this vast astonishment—was poor surprise as compared with the shock I got when I entered my father's house. For, there—new groomed and placid—sat the doctor; and my dear sister was close to him—oh, so joyfully close to him—her hand in his, her sweet face upturned to him and smiling, glowing with such faith and love as men cannot deserve: a radiant, holy thing, come straight from the Heart of the dear God, who is the source of Love.

"Oh!" I ejaculated, stopping dead on the threshold.

"Hello, Davy!" the doctor cried.

I fell into the handiest chair. "You got home," I observed, in a gasp. "Didn't you?"

He laughed.

"Sure," I began, vacantly, "an', ecod!" I exclaimed, with heat, "what craft picked *you* up?"

"The *Happy Sally*."

"Oh!" said I. 'Twas a queer situation. There seemed so little to say. "Was you drove far?" I asked, politely seeking to fill an awkward gap.

"South o' Belle Isle."

"Ah!"

The doctor was much amused—my sister hardly less so. They watched me with laughing eyes. And they heartlessly abandoned me to my own conversational devices: which turned me desperate.

"Is you goin' t' get married?" I demanded.

My sister blushed—and gave me an arch glance from behind her long, dark lashes. But—

"We are not without hope," the doctor answered, calmly, "that the Bishop will be on our coast next summer."

"I'm glad," I observed, "that you've both come t' your senses."

"Oh!" cried my sister.

"Ecod!" the doctor mocked.

"Ay," said I, with a wag. "I is *that!*"

The doctor spoke. "'Twas your sister," said he, "found the way. She discovered a word," he con-

tinued, turning tenderly to her, his voice charged with new and solemn feeling, "that I'd forgot."

"A word!" said I, amazed.

"Just," he answered, "one word."

'Twas mystifying. "An' what word," I asked, "might that word be?"

"'Expiation,'" he replied.

I did not know the meaning of that word—nor did I care. But I was glad that my dear sister—whose cleverness (and spirit of sacrifice) might ever be depended upon—had found it: since it had led to a consummation so happy.

"Skipper Tommy saved?" I enquired

"He's with the twins at the Rat Hole."

"Then," said I, rising, "as you're both busy," said I, in a saucy flash, "I'll be goin'——"

"You'll not!" roared the doctor. And he leaped from his seat—bore down upon me, indeed, like a mad hurricane: my sister laughing and clapping her little hands. So I knew I must escape or have my bones near crack under the pressure of his affection; and I was agile—and eluded him.

I found Skipper Tommy and the twins at the Rat Hole—the skipper established in comfort by the stove, a cup of tea at his hand, his stockinged feet put up to warm: the twins sitting close, both grin-

ning broadly, each finely alert to anticipate the old man's wants, who now had acquired a pampered air, which sat curiously upon him. "Seems t' me, Davy," he said, in a solemn whisper, at the end of the tale, new told for me, "that the dear Lard took pity. 'You done pretty well, Tommy,' says He, 't' put out t' the help o' Jagger in that there gale. I'm thinkin' I'll have t' change my mind about you,' says He. 'The twins, Tommy,' says He, 'is well growed, an' able lads, both, as I knowed when I started out t' do this thing; but I'm thinkin',' says He, 'that I'll please you, Tommy,' says He, 'by lettin' you live a little longer with them dear lads.' Oh," the skipper concluded, finding goodness in all the acts of the Lord, the while stretching out his rough old hand to touch the boys, his face aglow, "'twas wonderful kind o' Him t' let me see my lads again!"

The twins heartily grinned.

XXVIII

IN HARBOUR

WHEN the doctor was told of the tragic end of Jagger of Wayfarer's Tickle, he shuddered, and sighed, and said that Jagger had planned a noble death for him: but said no more; nor has he since spoken the name of that bad man. And we sent the master of the *Jessie Dodd* to St. Johns by the last mail-boat of that season—and did not seek to punish him: because he had lost all that he had, and was most penitent; and because Jagger was dead, and had died the death that he did. . . . The last of the doctor's small patrimony repaired the damage done our business by the wreck of the *Trap and Seine:* and brought true my old dream of an established trade, done with honour and profit to ourselves and the folk of our coast, and of seven schooners, of which, at last, the twins were made masters of two. . . . And that winter my sister was very happy—ay, as happy (though 'tis near sin to say it) as her dear self deserved. Sweet sister—star of my life! . . . The doctor, too, was happy; and not once (and many a cold night I

shivered in my meagre night-gown at his door to discover it)—not once did he suffer the old agony I had known him to bear. And when, frankly, I asked him why this was ——

"Love, Davy," he answered.

"Love?" said I.

"And labour."

"An' labour?"

"And the Gospel according to Tommy."

"Sure," I asked, puzzled, "what's that?"

"Faith," he answered.

"'Tis queer!" I mused.

"Just faith," he repeated. "Just faith in the loving-kindness of the dear God. Just faith—with small regard for creeds and forms."

This he said with a holy twinkle.

But that was long ago. Since then I have been to the colleges and hospitals of the South, and have come back, here, in great joy, to live my life, serving the brave, kind folk, who are mine own people, heartily loved by me: glad that I am Labrador born and bred—proud of the brave blood in my great body, of the stout purpose in my heart: of which (because of pity for all inlanders and the folk of the South) I may not with propriety boast. Doctor Davy, they call me, now. But I have not gone

lacking. I am not without realization of my largest hope. The decks are often wet—wet and white. They heave underfoot—and are wet and white—while the winds come rushing from the gray horizon. Ah, I love the sea—the sweet, wild sea: loveliest in her adorable rage, like a woman! . . . And my father's house is now enlarged, and is an hospital; and the doctor's sloop is now grown to a schooner, in which he goes about, as always, doing good. . . . And my sister waits for me to come in from the sea, in pretty fear that I may not come back; and I am glad that she waits, sitting in my mother's place, as my mother used to do.

And Skipper Tommy Lovejoy this day lies dying. . . .

I sit, a man grown, in my mother's room, which now is mine. It is spring-time. To-day I found a flower on the Watchman. Beyond the broad window of her room, the hills of Skull Island and God's Warning stand yellow in the sunshine, rivulets dripping from the ragged patches of snow which yet linger in the hollows; and the harbour water ripples under balmy, fragrant winds from the wilderness; and workaday voices, strangely unchanged by the years that are passed, come drifting up the hill from my father's wharves; and, ay, indeed, all the world

of sea and land is warm and wakeful and light of heart, just as it used to be, when I was a lad, and my mother lay here dying. But there is no shadow in the house—no mystery. The separate sorrows have long since fled. My mother's gentle spirit here abides—just as it used to do: touching my poor life with holy feeling, with fine dreams, with tender joy. There is no shadow—no mystery. There is a glory—but neither shadow nor mystery. And my hand is still in her dear hand—and she leads me: just as she used to do. And all my days are glorified—by her who said good-bye to me, but has not left me desolate.

Skipper Tommy died to-day. 'Twas at the break of dawn. The sea lay quiet; the sky was flushed with young, rosy colour—all the hues of hope. We lifted him on the pillows: that from the window he might watch—far off at sea—the light chase the shadows from the world.

"A new day!" he whispered.

'Twas ever a mystery to him. That there should come new days—that the deeds of yesterday should be forgot in the shadows of yesterday—that as the dawn new hope should come unfailing, clean, benignant.

"A new day!" he repeated, turning his mild old

face from the placid sea, a wondering, untroubled question in his eyes.

"Ay, zur—a new day."

He watched the light grow—the hopeful tints spread rejoicing towards the higher heavens.

"The Lard," he said, "give me work. Blessed be the name o' the Lard!"

All the world was waking.

"The Lard give me pain. Blessed be the name o' the Lard!"

And a breeze came with the dawn—a rising breeze, rippling the purple sea.

"The Lard give me love," he continued, turning tenderly to the stalwart twins. "Blessed be the name o' the Lard!"

The wind swept calling by—blue winds, fair winds to the north: calling at the window, all the while.

"The Lard showed Himself t' me. Oh, ay, that He did," he added, with a return to his old manner. "'Skipper Tommy,' says the Lard," he whispered, "'Skipper Tommy,' says He, 'leave you an' Me,' says He, 'be friends. You'll never regret it, b'y,' says He, 'an you make friends with Me.' Blessed," he said, his last, low voice tremulous with deep gratitude, "oh, blessed be the name o' the Lard!"

The wind called again—blithely called: crying at

the window. In all the harbours of our coast, 'twas time to put to sea.

"I wisht," the skipper sighed, "that I'd been—a bit—wickeder. The wicked," he took pains to explain, "knows the dear Lard's love. An', somehow, I isn't *feelin'* it as I should. An' I wisht—I'd sinned—a wee bit—more."

Still the wind called to him.

"Ecod!" he cried, impatiently, his hand moving feebly to tweak his nose, but failing by the way. "There I been an' gone an' made another mistake! Sure, 'tis awful! Will you tell me, Davy Roth, an you can," he demanded, now possessed of the last flicker of strength, "how I could be wicked without hurtin' some poor man? Ecod! I'm woeful blind."

He dropped my hand—suddenly: forgetting me utterly. His hands sought the twins—waving helplessly: and were caught. Whereupon the father sighed and smiled.

"Dear lads!" he whispered.

The sun rose—a burst of glory—and struck into the room—and blinded the old eyes.

"I wonder ——" the old man gasped, looking once more to the glowing sky. "I wonder . . ."

Then he knew.

How unmomentous is the death we die! This

passing—this gentle change from place to place! What was it he said? "'Tis but like wakin' from a troubled dream. 'Tis like wakin' t' the sunlight of a new, clear day. He takes our hand. 'The day is broke,' says He. 'Dream no more, but rise, child o' Mine, an' come into the sunshine with Me.' 'Tis only that that's comin' t' you—only His gentle touch—an' the waking. Hush! Don't you go gettin' scared. 'Tis a lovely thing—that's comin' t' you!" . . . And I fancy that the dead pity the living—that they look upon us, in the shadows of the world, and pity us. . . . And I know that my mother waits for me at the gate—that her arms will be the first to enfold me, her lips the first to touch my cheek. "Davy, dear, my little son," she will whisper in my ear, "aren't you glad that you, too, are dead?" And I shall be glad.

Ha! but here's a cheery little gale of wind blowing up the path. 'Tis my nephew—coming from my father's wharf. Davy, they call him. The sturdy, curly-pated, blue-eyed lad—Labradorman, every luscious inch of him: without a drop of weakling blood in his stout little body! There's jolly purpose in his stride—in his glance at my window. 'Tis a walk on the Watchman, I'll be bound! The wind's in the west, the sun unclouded, the sea in a ripple. The

day invites us. Why not? The day does not know that an old man lies dead. . . . He's at the door. He calls my name. "Uncle Davy! Hi, b'y! Where is you?" Ecod! but the Heavenly choir will never thrill me so. . . . He's on the stair. I must make haste. In a moment his arms will be round my neck. And ——

Here's a large period to my story! The little rascal has upset my bottle of ink!

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